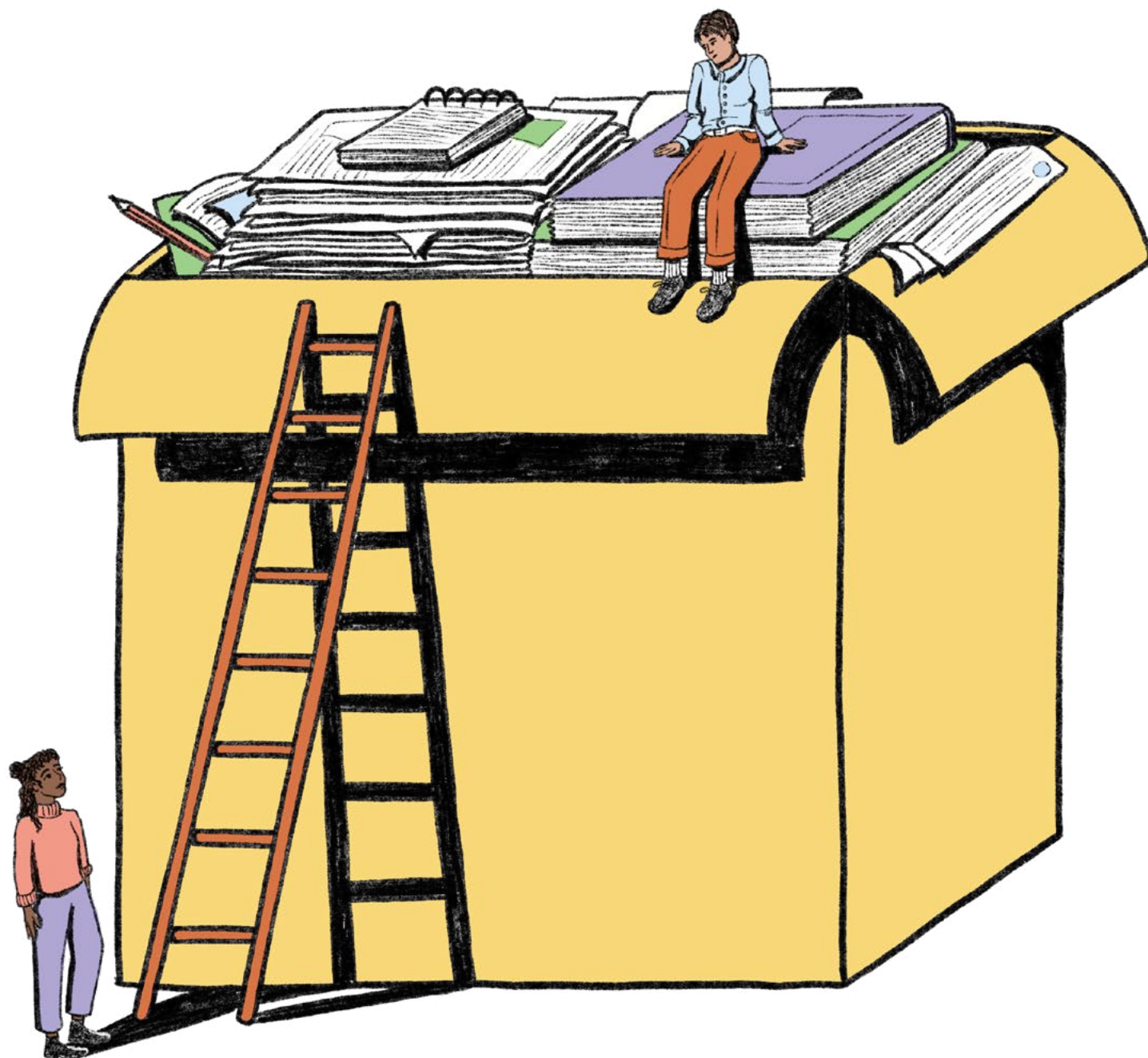


Archiving the Arts

Preserving Our Past, Cultivating Our Future



Guidelines and a Three-Part Study on Preserving
the History of BIPOC-Centered Arts Organizations

UCLA Community Archives Lab:

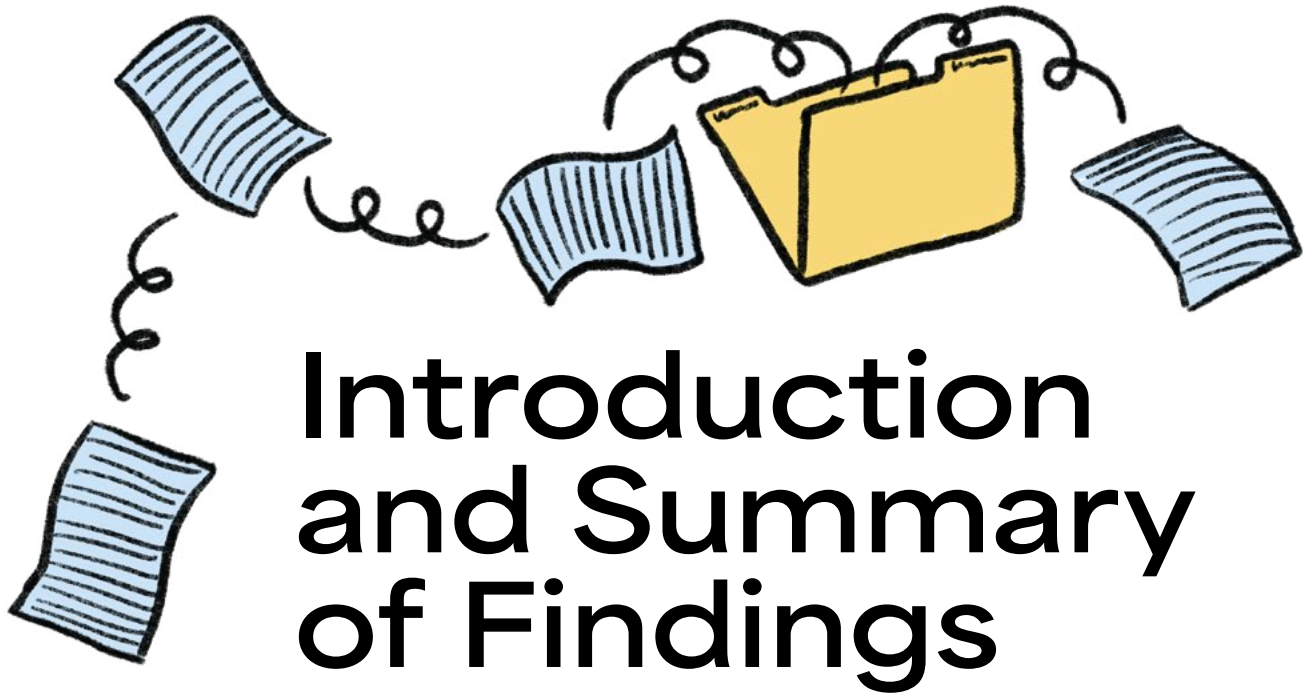
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Project led by SAADA

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Introduction and Summary of Findings

Tucked away in boxes in basements and garages, stored on hard drives, and distributed digitally in the cloud, the records documenting the rich legacy of arts organizations led by Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) in the U.S. are at risk. Precarious storage, lack of staff time and expertise, and neglect from institutional archives and funders have created the conditions for historical erasure. Without an organized nationwide initiative to support the preservation of these materials, vital cultural heritage is in danger of being lost forever.

Observing this risk anecdotally in various contexts over time provoked the following questions:

- How are BIPOC-centered arts organizations preserving their history?
- What expertise, resources, and programs are needed to steward their important cultural records?
- What is at stake when this history is lost?

Researchers from the UCLA Community Archives Lab and SAADA staff partnered on a three-year-long community-led participatory action research project, “Archiving the Arts,” to answer these questions and chart out possible paths to better safeguard the vital legacy of these organizations in the future. This resulting report brings together a series of guidelines for BIPOC-centered arts organizations interested in preserving their histories with a three-part mixed-methods study conducted between 2023 and 2025.

Part One of the study, “Survey of BIPOC-Centered Arts Organizations’ Archival Practices,” describes results of a survey of 113 such organizations assessing their archival needs. Survey findings indicate that BIPOC-centered arts organizations value and prioritize the preservation of their history, but that they require more financial support, time, resources, and skills to do so. Although many organizations are creatively documenting their programs using the resources at hand, there is a desire for partnerships with archival institutions based on trust and sensitivity.

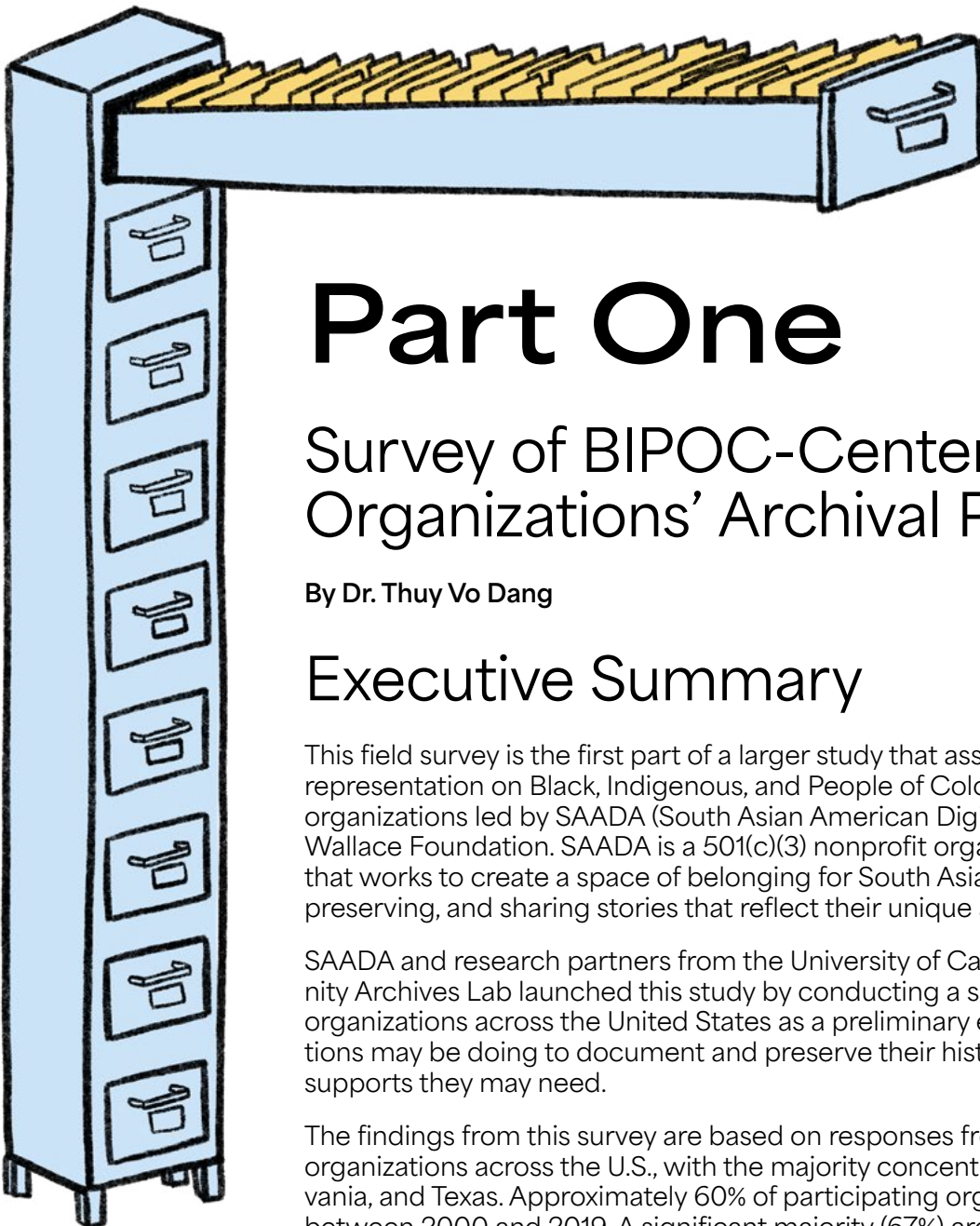
Part Two of the study, “No More Basements’: A Qualitative Report on BIPOC-Centered Arts Organizations’ Archival Practices and Needs,” is based on in-depth

semistructured interviews and focus groups with select organization leaders and staff. Part Two confirmed that, with some notable exceptions from newly established nonprofits, preserving organizational history was very important to most participating BIPOC-centered arts organizations and that organizational records, both analog and digital, are precariously stored and in danger of being lost. Part Two also uncovered how many partnerships between BIPOC-centered arts organizations and external archives have been fleeting and unsustainable, and yet, executive directors expressed a real need both for the time, labor, resources, and expertise to archive materials in-house and for partnerships with external archives that enable narrative and archival autonomy.

Part Three of the study, “Taking Stock, Planning for the Future: An Evaluation of SAADA’s Archiving the Arts Fellowship Program,” uses semistructured interviews with archivists and organizational liaisons to evaluate a yearlong fellowship program placing fellows with three South Asian arts organizations spread across the United States: The Music Circle in California, The South Asian Womxn’s Creative Collective (SAWCC) in New York, and Twelve Gates Arts in Pennsylvania. From the fellows’ perspective, six key themes emerged: the importance of documenting organizational histories, the current conditions of preexisting materials, the importance of using oral history to document histories, the challenges of the fellowship, the successes of the fellowship, and the challenges to continuing this work in the future. From the organizational liaisons’ perspective, five overlapping themes emerged: the importance of documenting organizational histories, archiving as a strategy for organizational continuity, current conditions of preexisting materials, the success of the project, and the challenges to continuing this work in the future. These interviews clearly indicate the success of SAADA’s Archiving the Arts Fellowship and suggest the potential to replicate this model with other BIPOC-centered community archives and arts organizations in the future.

The “Archiving the Arts Guidelines” provide a series of questions and considerations for arts organizations planning archival projects and proposing such projects to funders, including scope, audience, skills needed, budgetary concerns, ethical issues, and copyright clearance. The guidelines include a detailed list of online resources, including toolkits, to support archival planning.

Taken together, these findings indicate that BIPOC-centered arts organizations value and prioritize the preservation of their history and that, because these organizations house materials of immeasurable historical value that are in grave danger of being lost, institutional archives and funding agencies should pay more attention to and assist in providing more opportunities for care for these important organizational records. As the research demonstrates, BIPOC-centered arts organizations consider archiving as a strategy for organizational continuity; we therefore recommend, in part, that major effort be put toward providing training in basic archival skills (including digital archival skills) for staff at these organizations. It is critical that funding agencies consider actively supporting the hiring of trained archivists at BIPOC-centered arts organizations, and that archivists working for community archives, university archives, and other types of repositories proactively reach out to BIPOC-centered arts organizations to gauge when partnerships are desired. With collaborative effort, funders, organizations, and archives can work together to provide the resources, training, and labor to preserve this invaluable cultural heritage before it is too late.



Part One

Survey of BIPOC-Centered Arts Organizations' Archival Practices

By Dr. Thuy Vo Dang

Executive Summary

This field survey is the first part of a larger study that assesses the impact of archival representation on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)-centered arts organizations led by SAADA (South Asian American Digital Archive) and funded by The Wallace Foundation. SAADA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Philadelphia that works to create a space of belonging for South Asian Americans by documenting, preserving, and sharing stories that reflect their unique and diverse experiences.

SAADA and research partners from the University of California, Los Angeles Community Archives Lab launched this study by conducting a survey of BIPOC-centered arts organizations across the United States as a preliminary exploration of what organizations may be doing to document and preserve their histories and what resources or supports they may need.

The findings from this survey are based on responses from 113 BIPOC-centered arts organizations across the U.S., with the majority concentrated in California, Pennsylvania, and Texas. Approximately 60% of participating organizations were founded between 2000 and 2019. A significant majority (67%) are identified as very small and small organizations with annual operating budgets of under \$500,000.

Key findings from the survey indicate that BIPOC-centered arts organizations value and prioritize the preservation of their history; grassroots organizations require more financial support; time, resources, and skills are identified as primary areas to address; BIPOC-centered arts organizations are documenting and preserving their history based on resources at hand; partnerships with archival institutions are potentially effective; and collaboration with academic institutions is generally desired, but requires sensitivity.

Introduction

The arts sector has long been an important medium for storytelling, preserving cultural heritage, and shaping collective memory. Encompassing both tangible (e.g., paintings, monuments, archaeological objects) and intangible (e.g., ritual, performance, oral traditions) cultural heritage, the arts sector is a powerful realm for representing and negotiating belonging in American society. Among the hundred thousand-plus arts organizations that contribute to the United States' cultural landscape, there are thousands dedicated to serving and uplifting Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. While acknowledging that "BIPOC" remains contested within social justice organizing circles, academia, and the arts, we use this term to reference the specificities of U.S. systemic and relational oppression of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and as a means of considering the resistance of BIPOC to their historical and ongoing marginalization. We recognize that terms and their usage may shift over time.

BIPOC-centered arts organizations play a pivotal role in amplifying the histories, traditions, and perspectives of their communities, often challenging dominant narratives about marginalized groups. Narrative change toward a just and equitable future is our broader objective, but to get there, we are focusing on archival representation based on the mission and work of SAADA over the past 15 years.

Archives enable and reflect an organization's ability to tell its own stories to the public; therefore, this study aims to achieve greater equity in archival representation between mainstream arts institutions and the frequently less well-resourced arts organizations rooted in communities of color. BIPOC arts organizations/institutions are disadvantaged compared to predominantly white counterparts due to their relative youth, smaller size, and limited resources. They often face a scarcity of trained staff specializing in archival methods, contributing to the underrepresentation of BIPOC perspectives in archives. A 2021 survey by Ithaka S+R and the Society of American Archivists (SAA) suggests that BIPOC representation among archivists has grown in the last decade, but the profession remains overwhelmingly white (84%).¹ This is a significant factor in the inequities apparent in mainstream archives. This lack of representation in the profession impacts the historical and cultural documentation and disproportionately impacts communities of color, perpetuating disparities in representation and understanding. By providing BIPOC-centered arts organizations with a replicable methodology for documenting their histories, SAADA aims to advance the inclusion of marginalized perspectives in public discourse about the arts.

As the first phase of a two-year field study on the impact of archival representation on BIPOC-centered arts organizations, this report presents preliminary findings from a survey that explores what organizations may be doing to document and preserve their histories for the communities they serve. The data is drawn from 113 arts organizations across the U.S. that serve BIPOC communities. We are interested in learning more about their experience, if any, with archival and/or academic institutions for addressing the documentation, preservation, and dissemination of their histories. Appendix A provides a fuller description of the two-year field study.

The goals of this background data collection phase are to refine research questions, conduct initial conversations with BIPOC-centered arts organizations, collect and analyze organizational background data, and provide preliminary recommendations toward how arts organizations can best document their histories, either independently

1 Makala Skinner and Ioana G. Hulbert, "A*CENSUS II All Archivists Survey Report," Ithaka S+R, last modified 22 August 2022, <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.317224>.

or in partnership with academic institutions and/or archival repositories. The data will also inform the questions to be explored in more depth via focus groups and one-on-one interviews with select organization leaders who have responded to the survey. Additionally, the data may inform the fieldwork in year two through the placement of research fellows with three organizations for a nine-month period. The fellows will document the organizations' histories via storytelling and oral history, photography and/or video recording, digitizing organization records or ephemera, and other archival and memory practices.

The following research questions were identified by SAADA in consultation with our UCLA Community Archives Lab research partners to guide this project:

- **What resources or interventions do BIPOC-centered arts organizations need in order to document, preserve, and share their own histories?**
- **What affective and redistributive impact does archival representation have on arts communities of color?**
- **How can documentation practices enacted by BIPOC artists and arts organizations challenge dominant archival practices and envision new liberatory archival practices?**
- **What possibilities and pitfalls do the various approaches for archival representation—i.e., self-documentation, partnerships with community-based archives, or contributing to mainstream repositories—have for BIPOC-centered arts organizations?**

Appendix B provides additional background information on the UCLA Community Archives Lab and researcher biographies.

Survey Design

The survey consists of 21 questions organized in blocks that begin with questions related to the organization's background (year founded, mission, BIPOC communities served), operating budget range, sources of funding, and staffing structure. To begin assessing whether and how BIPOC-centered arts organizations document and preserve their histories, we need to understand who these organizations are. The survey asks about the importance and priority organization leaders place on documenting and preserving their history, what these practices are, if they have partnered with archival and/or academic institutions, and their level of satisfaction with these partnerships. The full list of questions can be found in Appendix D.

Participants were advised that the survey takes approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. We requested that the organization's executive director or a senior leader complete the survey. We collected contact information in order to follow up with a \$25 gift card as a token of gratitude for the first 100 respondents' time. Per the requirements of the UCLA Institutional Review Board, we disclosed that participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time.

Distribution

Our distribution process first required filtering through large databases of arts organizations and identifying those that are BIPOC-centered, based on their name and/or organization self-classification. Pulling initially from a robust inventory of over 4,000 organizations from Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA) research on arts

organizations of color,² we filtered out inactive organizations and those that do not qualify as BIPOC-centered. Then, we researched smaller, less well-resourced organizations to add to the list in order to get to a database of approximately 600 organizations, with the goal of yielding approximately 100 respondents. Our objectives for creating this distribution list were to represent a wide spectrum of arts disciplines, represent a diversity of BIPOC communities, and include organizations with different budget sizes and historical contexts.

Prior to distribution, we conducted a survey pretest with three organizations that SAADA or a lead researcher had existing relationships with in order to address the clarity of survey questions and flag other potential issues.

SAADA initially distributed the survey through the Qualtrics³ platform and then sent direct email outreach and social media messages with a survey link to increase the response rate. Our first round of distribution of the survey was to the list of ~100 organizations added to the database from our internet research to ensure inclusion of smaller, less well-resourced organizations. After two weeks, we expanded survey distribution to the full list of ~600.

The later round of distribution yielded hundreds of false responses, such as spam and bot-generated content, as well as responses from organizations that did not qualify as BIPOC-centered arts organizations. We took several steps to verify responses, including:

- **verified website or social media handle**
- **checked staff pages of websites and/or googled the name of the person who submitted to see if we could find a connection between them and the organization represented**
- **reviewed email addresses to determine if they followed likely email naming practices**
- **checked to see if mailing address was the same as address listed on the organization website**

Once we followed all verification steps, 113 organizations were determined to be “true” respondents.

Demographics

Among the 113 true respondents confirmed from over 600 responses, there were several noteworthy characteristics that provide a useful profile of BIPOC-centered arts organizations: the categories of racial groups served; geographical location; year founded; size, as determined by annual operating budget; and staffing model.

First, respondents mainly identified as serving Black or African American, Asian or Asian American, all BIPOC communities, or Hispanic or Latino/a/x communities in descending order. Respondents were asked to identify the community that is their organization’s primary focus and/or centered in its mission. The following chart shows a breakdown of the racial groups represented among survey respondents. The total exceeds 113, since respondents were able to select multiple categories.

2 Mirae Kim and Dr. Neville Vakharia, “Living Cultural Heritage and the Traditional and Folk Arts in the Non-profit Sector: Data on Scope, Finances, and Funding,” a report for the Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA). “The study contributes to a small but increasingly imperative body of research on arts and cultural organizations that serve nine underserved communities and communities of color.”

3 Qualtrics is a web-based software that allows the user to create surveys and generate reports.

Communities Served by Survey Respondents

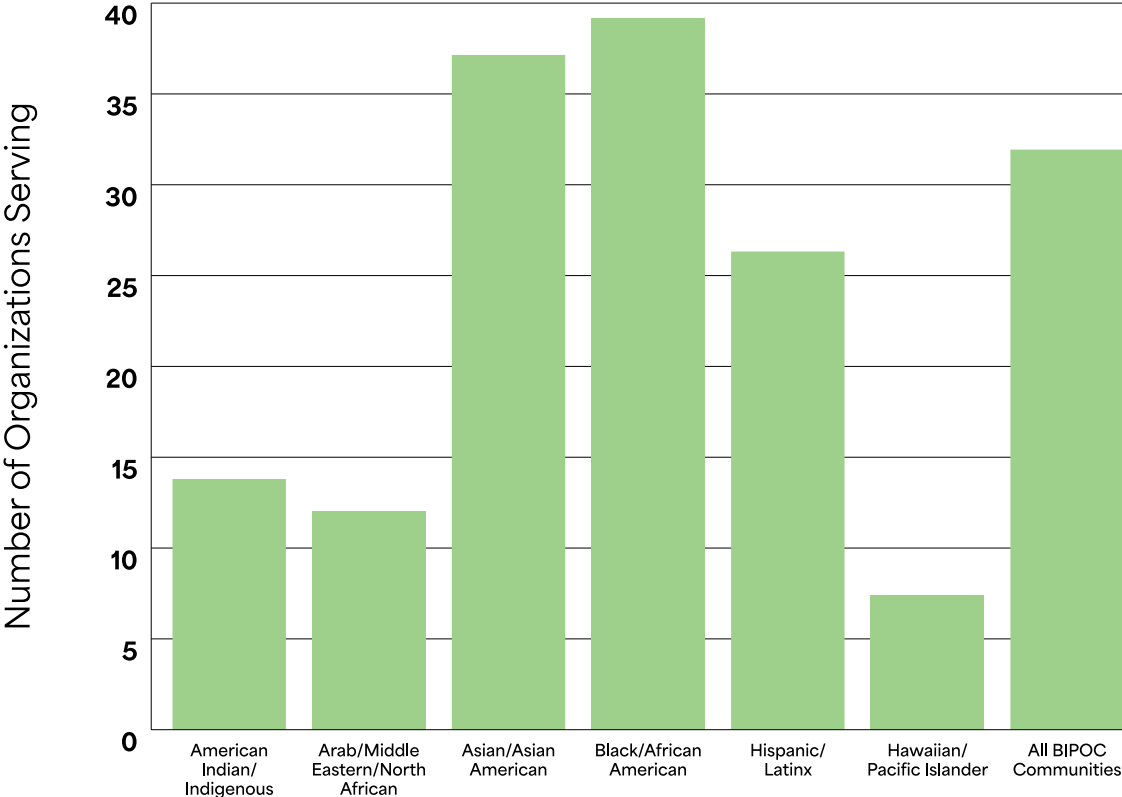


Fig. 1: Data from Survey Question 5

“Identify the community that is your organization’s primary focus and/or centered in its mission. Check all that apply.”

Survey Respondents by State

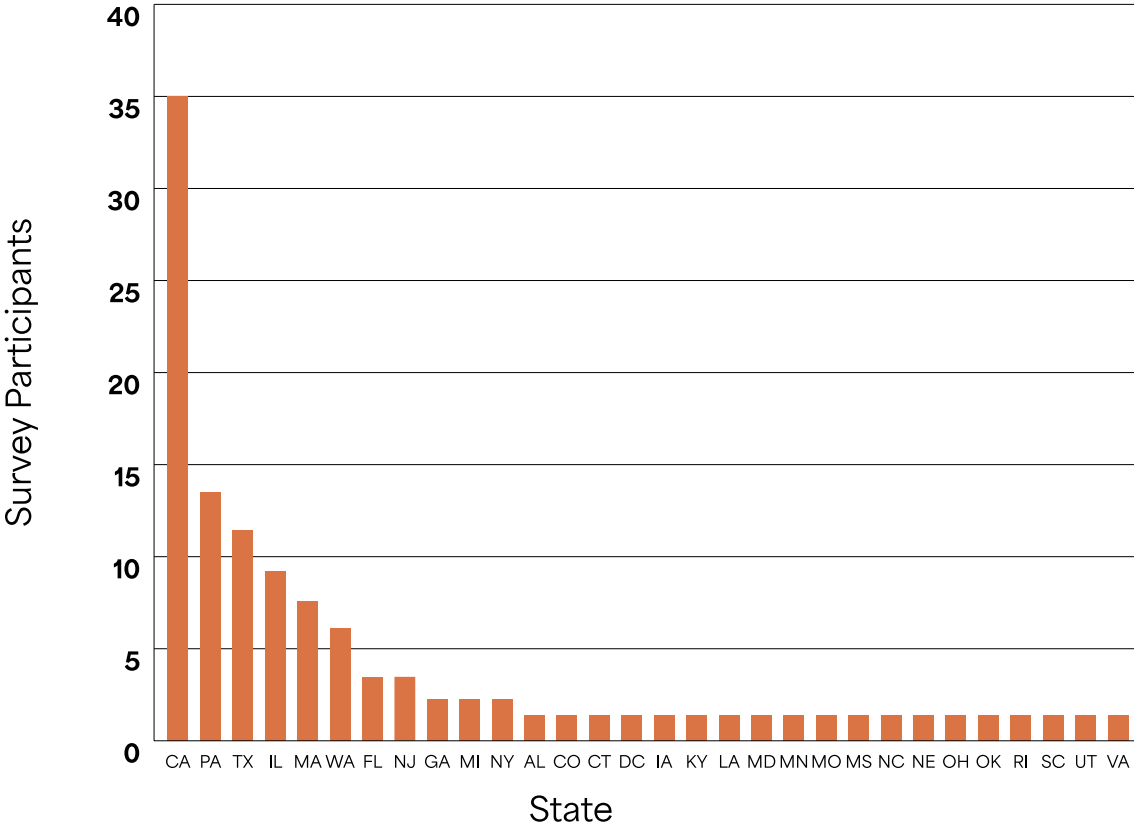


Fig. 2: Survey Question 10

“Your mailing address.”

Second, in terms of geographical distribution, over 50% of the respondents come from only three states: California, Pennsylvania, and Texas (see Fig. 2.) SAADA is located in Pennsylvania and the research partners are located in California, which may account for the skewing of participation toward these states. We also recognize that the concentration of BIPOC-centered arts organizations who responded to our outreach efforts in only a few states may have been due to sampling bias, meaning that the survey may have unintentionally targeted specific regions or states more heavily, leading to an uneven distribution of responses. This could be due to the survey’s distribution methods, promotional efforts, or accessibility issues by certain regions.

Third, participation in this survey comes from primarily young organizations. The median founding year of participating organizations is 2006, and more than 30% were founded in the 2010s.

Year Organization Was Founded

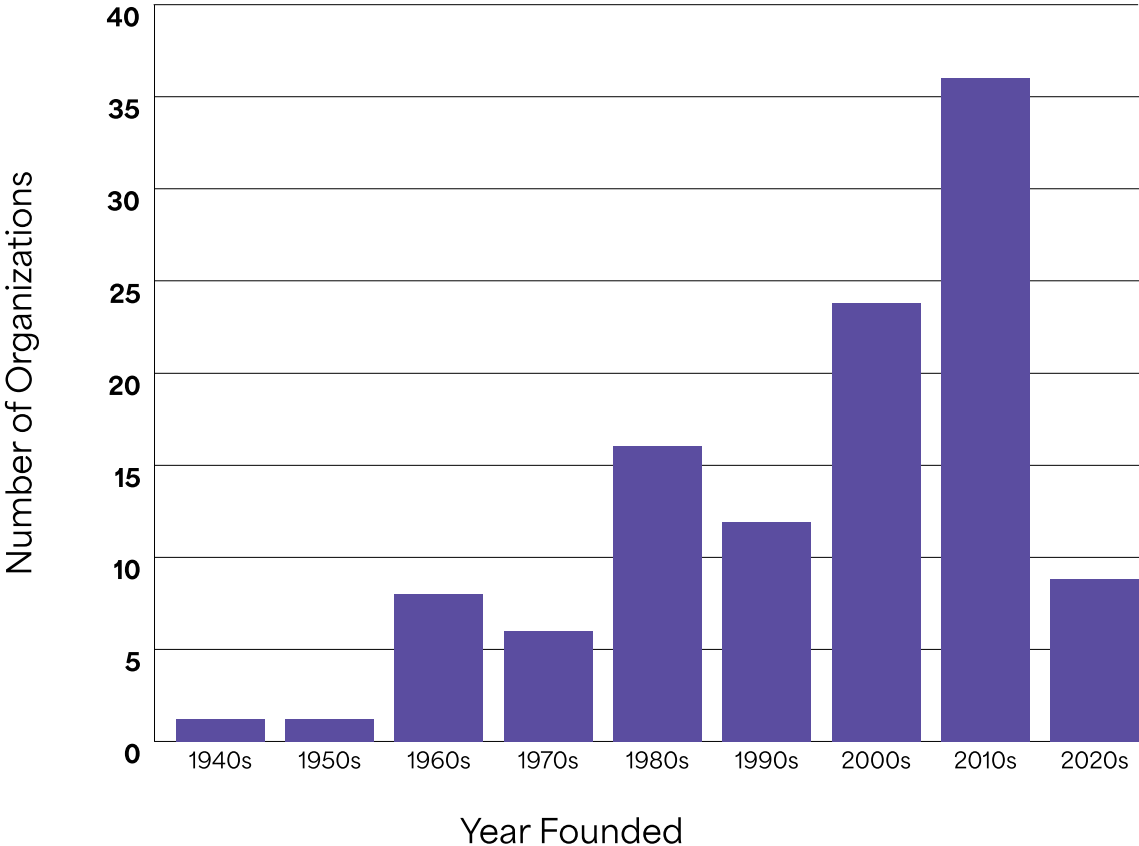


Fig. 3: Survey Question 3
 “Year organization was founded.”

Fourth, the size of the organizations, measured through their annual operating budget from the most recently reported fiscal year, is essential for analyzing their responses to questions about archival practices. Documenting and preserving organization and community history is time consuming, labor intensive, costly, and often does not fall directly within the scope of arts organization missions.

Initially, we referenced the Nonprofit Finance Fund’s 2022 State of the Nonprofit Sector Survey budget ranges, but then determined that we needed more gradations between their three categories of small, mid-sized, and large. We decided on five categories reflecting very small, small, mid-sized, large, and very large annual operating budgets. Our data shows that 67% of respondents are from very small (less than \$100,000) and small organizations (\$100,000–\$499,999).

There were no organizations with budgets of over \$5 million that participated in this survey, which is likely a result of our sampling bias through our deliberate outreach to smaller, less well-resourced organizations. We classified organizations as follows:

- very small = \$0 - \$99,999
- small = \$100,000 - \$499,999
- mid-sized = \$500,000 - \$999,999
- large = \$1,000,000 - \$4,999,999
- very large = \$5,000,000+

The significant proportion of organizations that fall under very small and small indicates the grassroots nature of BIPOC-centered arts organizations. The findings section will include more cross tabulations and analyses around these organization demographics and their prioritization and practices of documenting their histories as well as their potential partnerships with archival and/or academic institutions.

Organization Annual Operating Budget Range

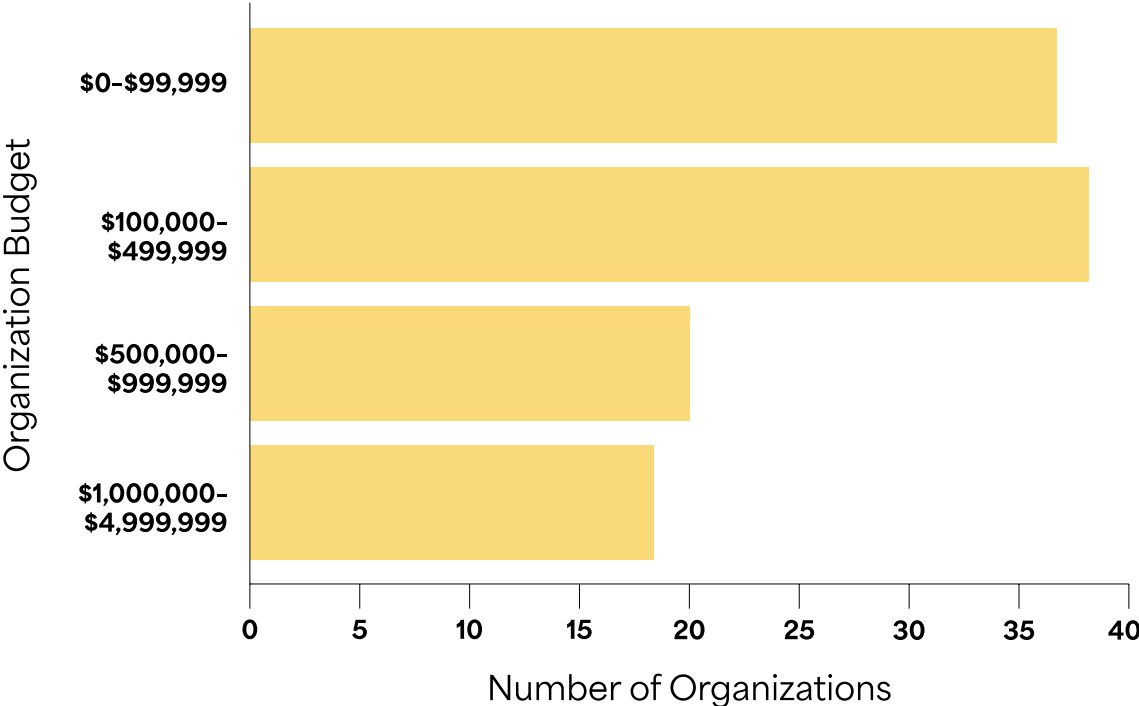


Fig. 4: Survey Question 11
“What was your operating budget for your most recently completed fiscal year?”

Finally, the staffing structure of BIPOC-centered arts organizations greatly impacts their ability to designate time and resources to preserve their history. The responses indicate that, overall, organizations rely on a hybrid staffing structure that includes full-time paid staff, part-time paid staff, independent contractors, and volunteers. Notably, only mid-sized and large organizations have full-time staffing. Very small and small organizations are less likely to have paid staff. Very small organizations are primarily volunteer-driven.

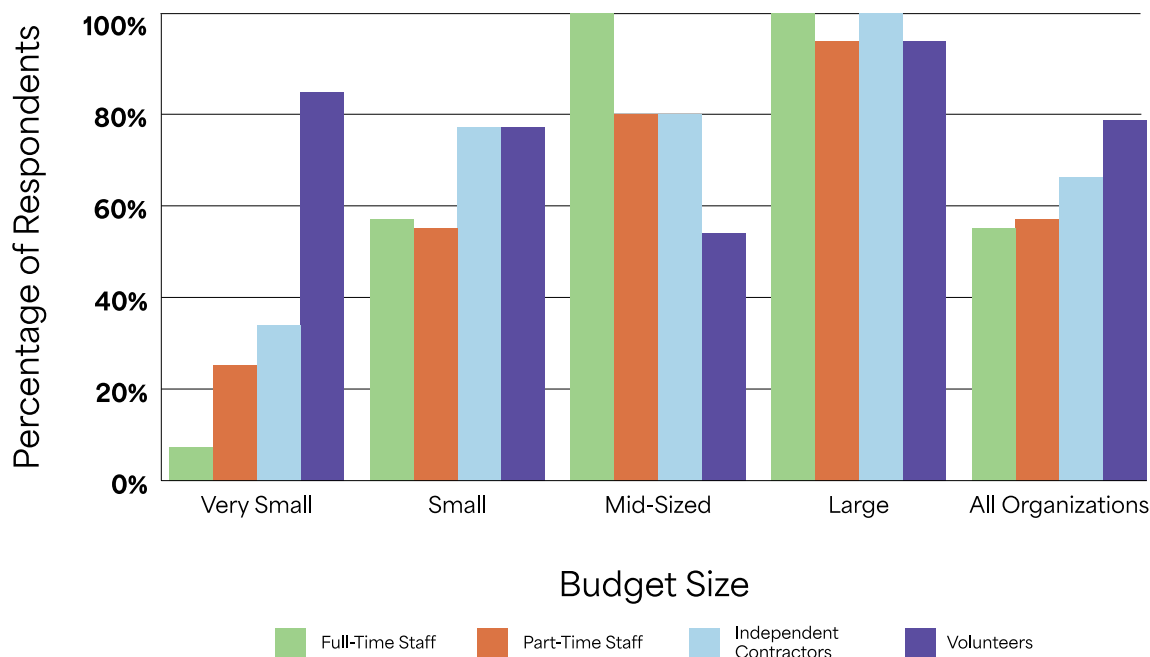
Fig. 5: Chart of Staffing Type by Budget Size Based on Survey Question 11 and Question 13

Question 11: “What was your operating budget for your most recently completed fiscal year?”

Question 13: “Organization staffing structure. Check all that apply:

- Full-time paid staff
- Part-time paid staff
- Paid independent contractors
- Volunteers
- Do not know”

Staffing Type by Budget Size



Key Findings

The preservation of history through the arts offers an empowering space to reclaim narratives, address erasure from the historical record, challenge dominant misrepresentations, and foster broader understanding about marginalized communities. We sought to understand what BIPOC-centered arts organizations have done to document and preserve their histories, what challenges they continue to face, and if they have effectively partnered with archival or academic institutions.

This report represents our aggregate and stratified findings. We analyzed the findings using frequency, cross tabulation, and descriptive analyses. Our survey data indicates important preliminary findings about the type of funding that BIPOC-centered arts organizations receive to sustain their work, the reasons organizations are not documenting their histories, some approaches they have taken, and the level of satisfaction some organizations have with partnering with archival repositories and academic institutions to preserve their histories.

Key Finding 1: BIPOC-centered arts organizations value and prioritize the preservation of their history

Overall, the majority of BIPOC-centered arts organizations seem to place high or very high priority on documenting and preserving their history (67%). We based this finding on a Likert scale question rating the priority that organization leaders place upon the work of documenting and preserving their history from very low to very high. While this prioritization may not necessarily translate into practice, this data gives us a baseline appreciation that this work is viewed as necessary among the organizations we surveyed.

Significantly, the priority of documentation is lower in small and very small (grassroots) organizations. We based this finding on the cross tabulation of organization budget

size and respondent rating of priority. Overall, 37.2% of small and very small organizations do not consider documentation to be high or very high priority from leadership. The size of the organization is a relevant factor in how they perceive their organization's priorities. Additional qualitative research is needed to understand the perceived and actual priorities among BIPOC-centered arts organizations.

Fig. 6: Survey Question 14 (right)

"To the best of your knowledge, please indicate the priority leaders in your organization place upon the work of documenting and preserving its history."

Priority Placed on the Work of Documenting and Preserving Organization History

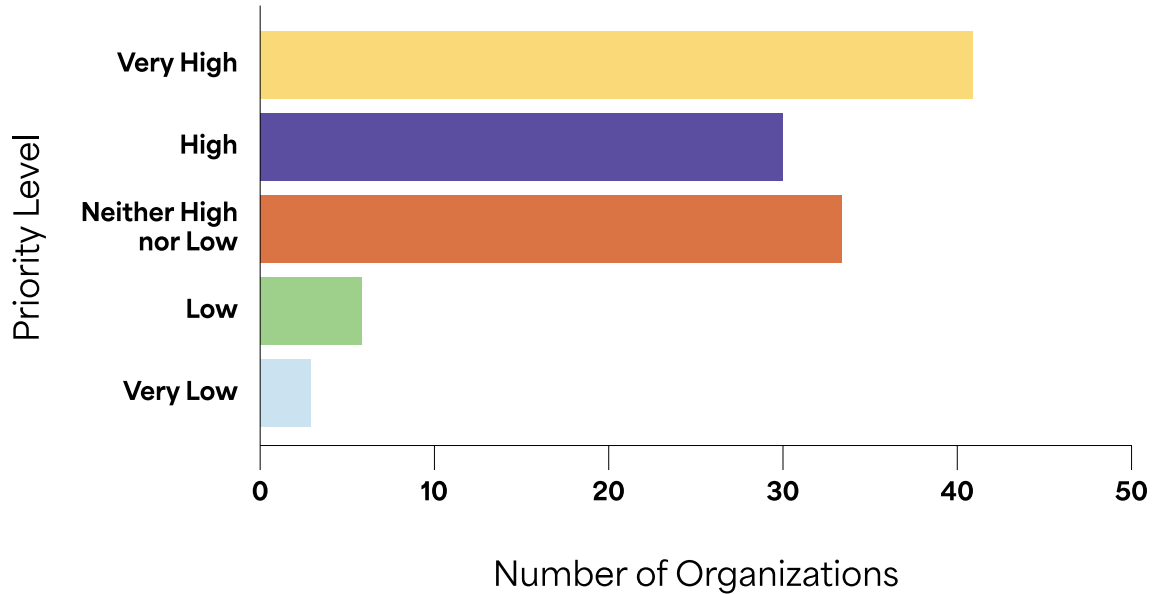


Fig. 7: Chart Based on Survey Questions 11 and 14 (below)

Question 11: "What was your operating budget for your most recently completed fiscal year?"

Question 14: "To the best of your knowledge, please indicate the priority leaders in your organization place upon the work of documenting and preserving its history."

Priority of Documenting by Leaders by Budget Size

		Budget Size				TOTAL
		Very Small	Small	Mid-Sized	Large	
Very High	Count	11	15	9	6	41
	% within budget size	29.7%	39.5%	45.0%	33.3%	36.3%
High	Count	10	10	6	4	30
	% within budget size	27.0%	26.3%	30.0%	22.2%	26.5%
Neither High nor Low	Count	9	12	5	7	33
	% within budget size	24.3%	31.6%	25.0%	38.9%	29.2%
Low	Count	5	1	0	1	7
	% within budget size	13.5%	2.6%	0.0%	5.6%	6.2%
Very Low	Count	2	0	0	0	2
	% within budget size	5.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%
TOTAL	Count	37	38	20	18	113
	% within budget size	100.0%*	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Key Finding 2: Grassroots organizations require more financial support

An analysis of the funding source in relation to the size of the organization paints an interesting picture. A large majority of all participating organizations (70.8%) receive some type of government or public support. However, a majority (51.4%) of very small organizations do not. While the overall majority of participating organizations (71.7%) receive foundation support, the very small organizations do not receive any foundation support. We identify the very small and small organizations as grassroots based on their financial and staffing structure.

Appendix E shows additional revenue sources cross tabulated with organization size (annual operating budget) and reveals that, overall, grassroots organizations receive very little support from government/public, corporate, foundation, and individuals. They also report significantly less earned-revenue sources. What this suggests is the need for investment in capacity building for grassroots organizations. In particular, grassroots organizations cannot and should not be expected to compete with mid-sized or large organizations; they may need different criteria of evaluation and measures of success in order to not become overburdened.

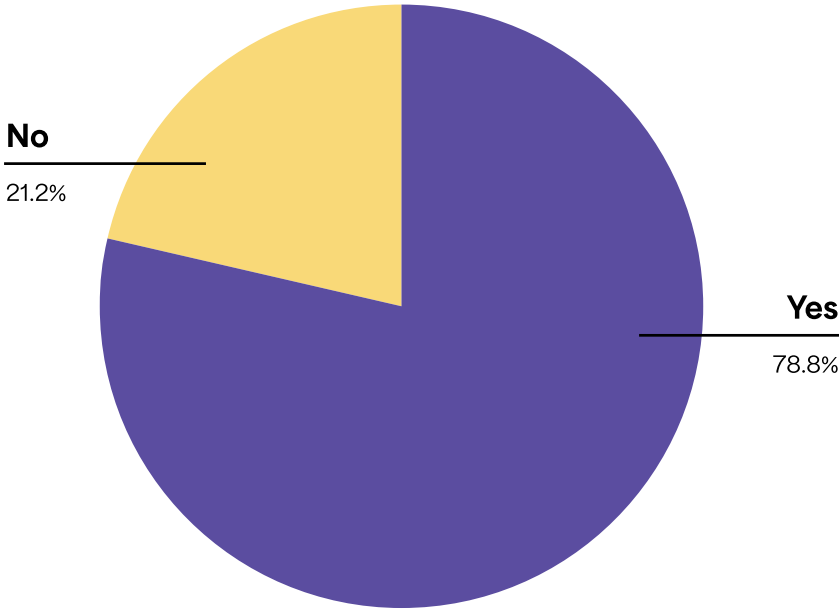
Key Finding 3: Time, resources, and skills are identified as primary areas to address

While participating organizations' interpretation of "documenting and preserving history" may vary, the survey paints a positive picture, showing that nearly 80% make a practice of doing so. They use a variety of strategies, which are discussed in the next section. Those that do not make a practice of documenting and preserving their history share useful information about their reasons for not doing so.

Does Your Organization Make a Practice of Documenting Its History?

Fig. 8: Survey Question 16

"Does your organization make a practice of documenting its history?"



Of the 24 organizations that indicated their organization does **not** make a practice of documenting its history, the most common reason was that their organization is too busy, followed by lack of resources and lack of skills, respectively. In other words, time, labor, and archival-specific skills are the primary areas that need to be addressed in order for organizations to be able to document and preserve their history.

Reasons for Organizations Not Documenting Their History

No Skills	Too Busy	Outside Scope	No Resources	Not Important
7.1%	12.4%	3.5%	11.5%	0.0%

Fig. 9: Survey Question 16A

"If no, then why not? Check all that apply."

Significantly, 18 out of 24 (75%) of the organizations that reported not documenting their history are grassroots organizations, further revealing that organization size is an important factor in not only the prioritization but also the practice of documenting and preserving history. This data suggests that small and very small organizations do not have the resources to document and preserve their history and will require additional support for this type of work.

Practice of Documenting History by Budget Size

		No	Yes	TOTAL
Very Small	Count	10	27	37
	% within budget size	27.0%	73.0%	100.0%
Small	Count	8	30	38
	% within budget size	21.1%	78.9%	100.0%
Mid-Sized	Count	4	16	20
	% within budget size	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
Large	Count	2	16	18
	% within budget size	11.1%	88.9%	100.0%
TOTAL	Count	24	89	113
	% within budget size	21.2%	78.8%	100.0%

Fig. 10: Chart Based on Question 11 and Question 16

Question 11: "What was your operating budget for your most recently completed fiscal year?"

Question 16: "Does your organization make a practice of documenting its history?"

Key Finding 4: BIPOC-centered arts organizations document and preserve history based on resources at hand

When it comes to approaches currently used by BIPOC-centered arts organizations to document and preserve their history, respondents gave various examples that may inform future research and institutional partnership strategies:

- A majority of organizations (56%) indicate that their website serves as a means of documenting their history.

- Nearly half of the respondents (46%) have a designated staff or volunteer who maintains their records (such as photographs, meeting minutes, administrative files, recordings, emails, and digital files), which reflect the organization’s history.
- Nearly a third (32%) of survey participants do not have one designated staff or volunteer who maintains their records. Their records remain with the organization’s founders. Nearly 30% of respondents indicate that they deposit their materials with an archives or other repository that helps maintain their historical records.
- 21% of respondents report that they initiated a project within their organization to document their organization’s history. Some of these projects that respondents mention include oral history projects, cataloging important exhibitions, and creating an anthology of old scripts.
- 23% of respondents indicate “Other practice related to documenting organization’s history,” which notably includes examples such as “archiving performances on social media” and “collaborating with historians to write about the organization’s history.”

What this suggests is that organizations are using the resources they have at hand, and archival institutions may consider adapting to what BIPOC-centered arts organizations are already doing given their time, resources, and skills. If websites are their primary mechanism for documenting and preserving their history, how might web-archiving strategies be considered in the partnership work? How might building archival skill be incorporated into the scope of an organization’s training of staff and volunteers?

Key Finding 5: Partnerships with archival institutions are potentially effective

Of the 22 organizations that reported having partnered with an external archival repository, the majority have worked with the following types of archives, in order of most frequently selected:

1. Academic (archives, libraries, special collections departments located in colleges and universities)
2. Other
3. Community archive (independent, based outside of institutions such as cities and schools)
4. Museum

Fig. 11: Data from Survey Question 18 and Question 18B

Question 18: “Has your organization partnered with an external archive to preserve organizational history?”

Question 18B: “Please rate how effective your partnership with the external archive was for your organization, with 1 indicating very ineffective and 5 indicating highly effective.”

Effectiveness of External Archive

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very Ineffective	2	9.1	9.1
Ineffective	2	9.1	18.2
Neither Effective nor Ineffective	2	9.1	27.3
Effective	10	45.5	72.8
Very Effective	6	27.3	100.0
TOTAL	22	100.0	

None of these reporting organizations have worked with government entities (such as a county or city archive). Overall, these organizations report a high degree of satisfaction with their archival partnerships, with the large majority (72.8%) finding them to be effective or very effective.

Examples of how they have partnered with an external archive include consultation, collecting and organizing materials, cataloging documents, creating filing systems, exhibition, publication, depositing materials, digitization, programming, and record-keeping. Digitizing organization records surfaced numerous times among the responses as a strategic area for archival collaborations.

A few examples serve to highlight challenges BIPOC-centered arts organizations face even with partnership arrangements with an external archive. As one small (operating budget of \$100,000–\$499,999) organization states:

We sent our printed materials of programs/events to the [academic archive] or their staff members collected our materials. However, we have not been able to transfer materials digitally frequently. We have not been able to set up a regular process to archive our materials.

Despite having a previously established partnership with an academic archive, this organization is not on an accrual schedule with their partner. This organization was founded in 1991, so they have been around for longer than a significant number of participants of this survey. Follow-up questions may identify what barriers exist to the regular transfer of organization materials for both the external archive and the arts organization.

Another respondent's explanation about their partnership with an academic archival repository points to a challenge that other respondents also face:

[Organization X] has worked with [academic institution Y] to digitize a small amount of our robust archive. This was helpful to an extent, as we do not have a larger and formalized connection to support the sustainability of our archive. Beyond that, we have had short-term funding from [a national organization] with someone studying to be an archivist. This was a short-term project and was not a holistic approach to our archive preservation.

This example identifies one of the key challenges to a “holistic approach” that would enable an organization to document and preserve its history in a sustainable way. Interestingly, this response comes from a mid-sized organization (operating budget of \$500,000–\$999,999) that is somewhat more established. They were founded in 1997, compared to the median founding year of 2006 for all responses. These factors may have enabled them to partner or collaborate with an external archival repository, yet they still struggle with sustainability due to the reliance on a short-term funding model of partnership.

These challenges gleaned from the survey fill-in responses may inform further research. The overall picture suggests that partnerships with archival repositories are viewed favorably by BIPOC-centered arts organizations. Such repositories may serve as one site of potential for the preservation of histories of marginalized communities in the U.S.

Key Finding 6: Collaboration with academic institutions is desired, but requires sensitivity

In addition to the small percentage that reported having partnered with external archives, more respondents have had experience collaborating with academic institutions in various capacities. This chart shows that 37.2% (42) of organizations have collaborated with academic researchers. However, it is significantly more prominent only with mid-sized and large organizations. The majority of very small and small organizations have not collaborated with academic researchers.

Collaboration with Academic Researchers by Budget Size

		Collaboration with Academic Researchers		
		No	Yes	TOTAL
Very Small	Count	30	7	37
	% within budget size	81.1%	18.9%	100.0%
Small	Count	24	14	38
	% within budget size	63.2%	36.8%	100.0%
Mid-Sized	Count	10	10	20
	% within budget size	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Large	Count	7	11	18
	% within budget size	38.9%	61.1%	100.0%
TOTAL	Count	71	42	113
	% within budget size	62.8%	37.2%	100.0%

Fig. 12: Data from Survey Question 11 and Question 19

Question 11: "What was your operating budget for your most recently completed fiscal year?"

Question 19: "Has your organization collaborated with academic researchers, including students from colleges and universities, to document your organization or community history?"

Budget Size

More qualitative research is needed to understand the reason for academic researchers' lack of collaboration with very small and small organizations. Potential inquiries can address why grassroots organizations seem to be falling under the radar of academic institutions. What structural barriers exist for researchers and what exist for the organizations to collaborate or cultivate partnerships?

Of the 42 organizations that reported academic collaboration, 62% reported being satisfied or very satisfied. No organizations among the 42 reporting indicated dissatisfaction with academic collaboration. While this figure presents a positive overall picture of collaborations with academic researchers, it is worth noting that 38% of those reporting indicated they are "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" with their collaboration. This raises questions about the nature of those efforts.

The examples offered among those who indicated "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" reveal possible reasons. Among the reasons gleaned from the write-in answers, we noted that the organization may not be very far along in their collaboration and have no basis to judge, the representative completing the survey may not be able to address this particular question, or their interactions have been neither productive nor negative enough to warrant dissatisfaction. Some of the comments from these

respondents include:

- *About 10 years ago, undergraduate students transferred files into acid-free folders and began a database inventory.*
- *We have been interviewed by academics working in at least two or three departments from local universities to discuss our work history.*
- *Our organization is studied consistently by many scholars and students for the purposes of exhibitions, publications, etc. Often, they are not necessarily looking at [our organization] as a whole, but rather a specific project, initiative, or artist(s). Because of this, the totality of our organizational story is difficult to find and must be put together by many different sources.*
- *Academic researchers provide very little documentation, because interns come and go with no sustainable, strategic collaboration with centralized databased and archived history.*
- *Periodically we will receive requests for interviews, etc., that live on the interviewers' archive.*
- *We collaborated on an oral history with academic [researcher A from X college]; we also collaborated with the [Y institute with academic researcher B]—both in 2010. We are open to collaborating with researchers who reach out to us, but do not have the capacity to proactively seek this type of documentation work.*

The comments range from straightforward and descriptive to slightly critical. Taken together, they suggest respondents are reflecting on a pattern of transactional or extractive practices wherein academics may come in for a short period of time, perhaps complete a few tasks or learn what they need to learn, and then leave without contributing to the organization's documentation or preservation efforts.

The quantitative and qualitative data combined from this survey suggests that BIPOC-centered arts organizations are generally open and willing to collaborate with academic institutions, but those with some experience with these relationships may be cautious.

Satisfaction with Academic Collaboration

Fig. 13: Survey Question 19B

"Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the collaboration with academic researchers for the purpose of documenting organizational history on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating very dissatisfied and 5 indicating very satisfied."

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	16	38.1	38.1
Satisfied	14	33.3	71.4
Very Satisfied	12	28.6	100.0
TOTAL	42	100.0	

Conclusion

Based on the data gathered from 113 participating BIPOC-centered arts organizations, we have determined that the majority value and prioritize the documentation and preservation of their history. They recognize the importance of their organization in contributing to collective memory and broader understanding of the communities they serve. It is not a surprise that our data reveals that grassroots organizations require more structural support. They are stretched thin in their primary mission-centered work, and archiving their organization's history does not usually fall within the everyday responsibilities of paid staff or volunteers. Therefore, time, resources, and skills were identified by these organizations as primary areas to address.

We are encouraged by the data that indicates BIPOC-centered arts organizations are documenting and preserving their history based on resources at hand. Some have been able to partner with archival institutions with positive outcomes. Similarly, organizations generally desire collaboration with academic institutions, but these relationships must be navigated with sensitivity.

We hope to inspire greater recognition and support for the crucial role played by BIPOC-centered arts organizations in preserving and providing access to BIPOC community histories. By surfacing the challenges and experiences of these organizations, we hope to initiate meaningful conversations on the importance of equitable representation and historical preservation in the arts sector.

Appendices

Appendix A: SAADA-Wallace Project Summary

SAADA (South Asian American Digital Archive) creates a space of belonging for South Asian Americans. Archives reflect and enable an organization's agency in deciding how its stories are shared with the public. However, to date, there is a significant discrepancy in archival representation between BIPOC arts organizations and predominantly white arts institutions. This study will investigate the resources arts organizations of color need in order to best document, preserve, and share their own histories. It will explore how these documentation practices can challenge dominant archival methods and envision new liberatory practices. Using community-led participatory action research, SAADA and its research collaborators will conduct surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews with BIPOC arts organizations. In the study's second phase, three field researchers will each document one South Asian American arts organization, capturing oral history interviews and collecting physical and digital ephemera. Researchers will subsequently produce a toolkit for BIPOC arts organizations to document their own institutional histories, aiming to advance the inclusion of marginalized perspectives in public discourse about the arts.

Appendix B: UCLA Community Archives Lab Research Partner Information and Biographies

SAADA's research partners for the study, Dr. Michelle Caswell, Dr. Tonia Sutherland, and Dr. Thuy Vo Dang, are codirectors of the University of California, Los Angeles Community Archives Lab and have published extensively on the impact of archival representation on minoritized communities. The UCLA Community Archives Lab was founded by Professor Michelle Caswell in 2016 to explore the ways that independent, identity-based memory organizations document, shape, and provide access to the histories of minoritized communities, with a particular emphasis on understanding their affective, political, and artistic impact. In 2022, Professors Thuy Vo Dang and Tonia Sutherland joined the Lab as codirectors.

The Lab's research has been published in *The American Archivist*, *Archival Science*, *Archivaria*, *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies*, *American Historical Review*, *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*, *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, *The Public Historian*, *Archives and Manuscripts*, and *The Library Quarterly*, as well as in several edited volumes. Publications emerging from the Lab have won the 2020 Hugh A. Taylor Prize for best paper published in *Archivaria* (Gracen Brilmyer, Joyce Gabiola, Jimmy Zavala, and Dr. Michelle Caswell, "Reciprocal Archival Imaginaries: The Shifting Boundaries of 'Community' in Community Archives") from the Association of Canadian Archivists; and the 2017 Fellows' Ernst Posner Award for best paper published in *The American Archivist* (Dr. Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario H. Ramirez, "'To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing': Uncovering the Affective Impact of Community Archives") by the Society of American Archivists.

Since 2016, the Lab has received support from the Mellon Foundation, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and various sources at UCLA, including a UCLA Transdisciplinary Research Grant, a UBC-UCLA Collaborative Research Mobility Grant, a UCLA Institute of American Cultures Research Grant, and a UCLA Center for the Study of Women Research Grant.

Dr. Michelle Caswell is Professor of Information Studies at UCLA. In 2008, together

with Samip Mallick, Caswell co-founded SAADA. She is the author of two books: *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work* (Routledge, 2021) and *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), as well as more than three dozen peer-reviewed articles.

Dr. Tonia Sutherland is Assistant Professor of Information Studies at UCLA. Global in scope, Sutherland's research focuses on entanglements of technology and culture, with particular emphases on critical and liberatory work within the fields of archival studies, digital studies, and science and technology studies. Sutherland is the author of *Resurrecting the Black Body: Race and the Digital Afterlife* (UC Press, 2023). She is also a faculty affiliate of the Center for Critical Race and Digital Studies at NYU and codirector of AfterLab at the University of Washington's iSchool.

Dr. Thuy Vo Dang is Assistant Professor of Information Studies at UCLA, specializing in oral history, archival studies, and ethnic studies. For over a decade, she has been an arts advocate in the Southern California region, serving on the board of directors for Arts Orange County and the Vietnamese American Arts and Letters Association. Her publications include *A People's Guide to Orange County* (UC Press, 2022) and *Vietnamese in Orange County* (Arcadia Publishing, 2015).

Appendix C: Arts Advisor

Dr. Neville Vakharia is the Associate Dean for Research and Planning at Drexel University's Westphal College of Media Arts & Design and an Associate Professor of Arts Administration & Museum Leadership. He teaches leadership, strategic planning, entrepreneurship, and related subjects while undertaking research and development projects that seek to strengthen the arts, cultural, and creative sectors. His research centers on the role that technology, innovation, and knowledge management play in building sustainable, resilient, and relevant organizations and communities. His work has been published internationally, and he has developed new tools and resources to benefit the cultural and social sectors.

Appendix D: Survey Questionnaire

Survey of BIPOC Arts Organizations' Archival Representation

Introduction: By continuing this survey, I understand that my answers will be used in a research study. Participation is voluntary.

This survey, the first phase of a study led by SAADA and funded by The Wallace Foundation, assesses the impact of archival representation on Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)-centered arts organizations. The researchers aim to explore what BIPOC arts organizations do to document their histories and what additional resources they may need.

The survey should take less than 15 minutes to complete. We will be collecting your contact information in order to send you a \$25 gift card as a token of gratitude for your time. Your personal information will not be included in any publications. We ask that your organization's executive director or a senior leader complete the survey. Data collected will be used in published academic articles and in administrative reports. We will share with participants a summary of the survey results.

Contact information for Lead Researchers:

Dr. Michelle Caswell: caswell@gseis.ucla.edu

Dr. Tonia Sutherland: sutherland@gseis.ucla.edu

Dr. Thuy Vo Dang: thuyvodang@ucla.edu

Question 1

Organization name. Please spell out the full name, no acronyms:

Question 2

Organization website URL or social media handles:

Question 3

Year organization was founded:

Question 4

Organization mission/purpose:

Question 5

Identify the community that is your organization's primary focus and/or centered in its mission. Check all that apply.

- American Indian or Alaska Native or Indigenous or First Nations (1)
- Arab or Middle Eastern or North African (2)
- Asian or Asian American (3)
- Black or African American (4)
- Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx origin (5)
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (6)
- My organization collectively focuses across all BIPOC communities (7)
- My organization prefers this description: (8)

Question 6

Your name:

Question 7

Your title:

Question 8

Your email address:

Question 9

Your phone number:

Question 10

Your mailing address:

Question 11

What was your operating budget for your most recently completed fiscal year?

- \$0-\$99,999 (1)
- \$100,000-\$499,999 (2)
- \$500,000-\$999,999 (3)
- \$1,000,000-\$4,999,999 (4)
- \$5,000,000+ (5)

Question 12

What sources of financial support did your organization receive in your most recently completed fiscal year? Check all that apply.

- Individual donors (1)
- Government grants (federal, state, and local) (2)
- Foundations (3)
- Corporations (4)
- Earned revenue. Source(s) of earned revenue: _____ (5)

Question 13

Organization staffing structure. Check all that apply.

- Full-time paid staff (1)
- Part-time paid staff (2)
- Paid independent contractors (3)
- Volunteers (4)
- Do not know (5)

Question 14

To the best of your knowledge, please indicate the priority leaders in your organization place upon the work of documenting and preserving its history, with 1 as very low priority and 5 as very high priority:

- Very low (1)
- Low (2)
- Neither high nor low (3)
- High (4)
- Very high (5)

Question 15

Do you think documenting your organization's history is important?

- If yes, why do you think documenting your organization's history is important? (1)
- If no, why not? (2)

Question 16

Does your organization make a practice of documenting its history?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)

Question 16A

If no, then why not? Check all that apply.

- We don't have the skills (1)
- We are too busy (2)
- It's outside the scope of our work (3)
- We don't have the resources (4)
- It's not important (5)
- Other _____ (6)

Question 16B

My organization does the following (check all that apply):

- We have a designated staff or volunteer who maintains our records (such as photographs, meeting minutes, administrative files, recordings, emails, digital files), which reflect the organization's history (1)
- We do not have one designated staff or volunteer who maintains our records. Our records remain with the organization's founders (2)
- We deposit our materials with an archives or other repository that helps us maintain our historical records (3)
- Our organization's website serves as a means of documenting our history (4)
- We initiated a project within our organization to document our organization's history. Please describe: _____ (5)
- Other practice related to documenting organization's history: _____ (6)

Question 17

What types of materials show your organization's history? Examples of materials may include meeting minutes, bylaws, event/program publicity materials, artwork, photographs, correspondence.

Question 17A

Where are those materials located?

Question 18

Has your organization partnered with an external archive to preserve organizational history?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)

Question 18A

What type of institution was it? (Check all that apply.)

- Government (such as a county or city archive) (1)
- Academic (archives, libraries, special collections departments located in colleges and universities) (2)
- Museum (3)
- Community archive (independent, based outside of institutions such as cities and schools) (4)
- Other: _____ (5)

Question 18B

Please rate how effective your partnership with the external archive was for your organization, with 1 indicating very ineffective and 5 indicating highly effective:

- Very ineffective (1)
- Ineffective (2)
- Neither effective nor ineffective (3)
- Effective (4)
- Very effective (5)

Question 18C

Please briefly describe the project or projects you worked on with the external archive. Examples might include depositing your materials, digitization, programming, exhibition, performance, publication, preservation consulting.

Question 19

Has your organization collaborated with academic researchers, including students from colleges and universities, to document your organization or community history?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)

Question 19A

Please briefly describe your collaboration with academic researchers for the purpose of documenting organizational history.

Question 19B

Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the collaboration with academic researchers for the purpose of documenting organizational history on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating very dissatisfied and 5 indicating very satisfied.

- Very dissatisfied (1)
- Dissatisfied (2)
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)
- Satisfied (4)
- Very satisfied (5)

Question 20

Please share any other thoughts or feedback you have on preserving your organization's history:

Question 21

Would you or a representative from your organization be interested in participating in an additional component of this paid research study, either as part of a 1.5-hour focus group or a 45-minute one-on-one interview? Participants will be compensated \$150 for their time.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Appendix E: Revenue Sources for BIPOC-Centered Arts Organizations

Revenue from Individuals by Budget Size

This chart indicates that a significant portion of very small and small organizations do not receive any contributions from individuals. This also shows that 20.4% of all organizations received no individual contributions.

Revenue: Individuals

Budget Size		No	Yes	TOTAL
Very Small	Count	12	25	37
	% within budget size	32.4%	67.6%	100.0%
Small	Count	6	32	38
	% within budget size	15.8%	84.2%	100.0%
Mid-Sized	Count	3	17	20
	% within budget size	15.0%	85.0%	100.0%
Large	Count	2	16	18
	% within budget size	11.1%	88.9%	100.0%
TOTAL	Count	23	90	113
	% within budget size	20.4%	79.6%	100.0%

Revenue from Government by Budget Size

This chart shows that the majority of organizations (70.8%) receive some type of government/public support. However, a majority (51.4%) of very small organizations do not.

Revenue: Government

Budget Size		No	Yes	TOTAL
Very Small	Count	19	18	37
	% within budget size	51.4%	48.6%	100.0%
Small	Count	10	28	38
	% within budget size	26.3%	73.7%	100.0%
Mid-Sized	Count	2	18	20
	% within budget size	10.0%	90.0%	100.0%
Large	Count	2	16	18
	% within budget size	11.1%	88.9%	100.0%
TOTAL	Count	33	80	113
	% within budget size	29.2%	70.8%	100.0%

Revenue from Foundations by Budget Size

Revenue: Foundations

		No	Yes	TOTAL
Very Small	Count	24	13	37
	% within budget size	64.9%	35.1%	100.0%
Small	Count	6	32	38
	% within budget size	15.8%	84.2%	100.0%
Mid-Sized	Count	2	18	20
	% within budget size	10.0%	90.0%	100.0%
Large	Count	0	18	18
	% within budget size	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL	Count	32	81	113
	% within budget size	28.3%	71.7%	100.0%

This chart shows that the majority of very small organizations do not receive foundation support. It also shows that all large organizations reporting receive foundation support. Overall, the majority (71.7%) receive foundation support.

Budget Size

Revenue from Corporations by Budget Size

Revenue: Corporations

		No	Yes	TOTAL
Very Small	Count	31	6	37
	% within budget size	83.8%	16.2%	100.0%
Small	Count	25	13	38
	% within budget size	65.8%	34.2%	100.0%
Mid-Sized	Count	11	9	20
	% within budget size	55.0%	45.0%	100.0%
Large	Count	3	15	18
	% within budget size	16.7%	83.3%	100.0%
TOTAL	Count	70	43	113
	% within budget size	61.9%	38.1%	100.0%

This chart shows that, overall, only 38.1% of organizations receive corporate support, which is highly dependent on organization size (ranging from 16.2% for very small to 83.3% for large organizations).

Budget Size

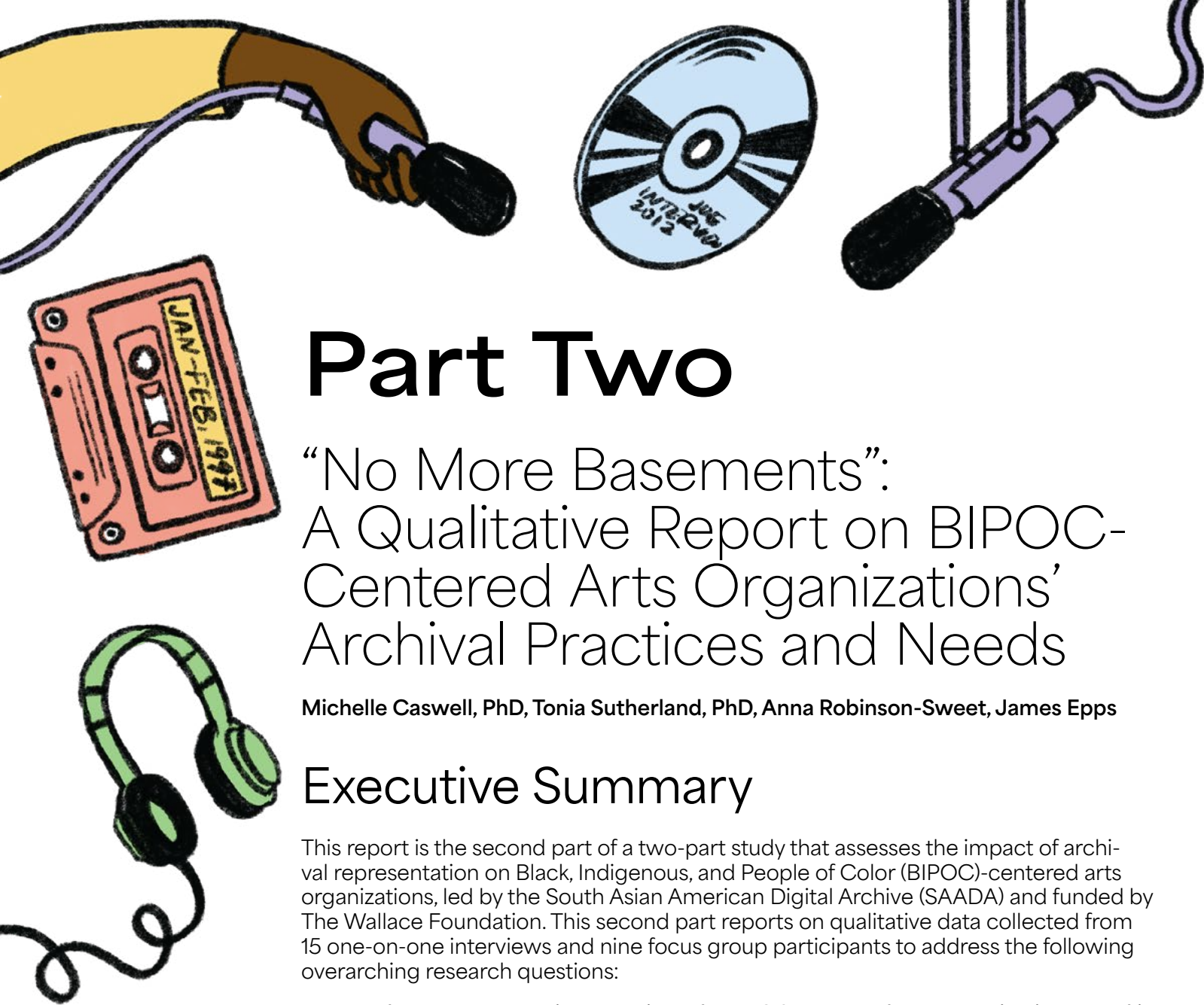
Earned Revenue by Budget Size

Revenue: Earned

Only a slight majority of all organizations reported earned revenue, which is also heavily dependent on organization size, with a large majority of large organizations having earned revenue.

Budget Size

		No	Yes	TOTAL
Very Small	Count	21	16	37
	% within budget size	56.8%	43.2%	100.0%
Small	Count	17	21	38
	% within budget size	44.7%	55.3%	100.0%
Mid-Sized	Count	5	15	20
	% within budget size	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
Large	Count	4	14	18
	% within budget size	22.2%	77.8%	100.0%
TOTAL	Count	47	66	113
	% within budget size	41.6%	58.4%	100.0%



Part Two

“No More Basements”: A Qualitative Report on BIPOC- Centered Arts Organizations’ Archival Practices and Needs

Michelle Caswell, PhD, Tonia Sutherland, PhD, Anna Robinson-Sweet, James Epps

Executive Summary

This report is the second part of a two-part study that assesses the impact of archival representation on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)-centered arts organizations, led by the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) and funded by The Wallace Foundation. This second part reports on qualitative data collected from 15 one-on-one interviews and nine focus group participants to address the following overarching research questions:

- What resources or interventions do BIPOC-centered arts organizations need in order to document, preserve, and share their own histories?
- What affective and redistributive impact does archival representation have on arts communities of color?
- How can documentation practices enacted by BIPOC artists and arts organizations challenge dominant archival practices and envision new liberatory archival practices?
- What possibilities and pitfalls do the various approaches for archival representation (i.e., self-documentation, partnerships with community-based archives, or contributing to mainstream repositories) have for BIPOC-centered arts organizations?

Our interviews and focus groups surfaced the following themes:

1. With some notable exceptions from newly established nonprofits, preserving organizational history was very important to most participating BIPOC-

centered arts organizations.

2. Organizational records, both analog and digital, are precariously stored and in danger of being lost.
3. With some exceptions, partnerships between BIPOC-centered arts organizations and external archives have been fleeting and unsustainable, with many established archives shifting the burden of funding such partnerships onto the already financially burdened arts organization, who are often left with little to show for their efforts and resources at the end of the partnership.
4. There is a real need both for the time, labor, resources, and expertise to archive materials in-house and for partnerships with external archives that enable narrative and archival autonomy.

Based on these themes, we make the following recommendations moving forward:

1. Archives and funding agencies need to pay more attention to and provide more care toward the records of BIPOC-centered arts organizations. These organizations house materials of immeasurable historical value that are in grave danger of being lost.
2. Major effort should be put toward providing training for basic archival skills, including digital archival skills, to staff at BIPOC-centered arts organizations.
3. Funding agencies should actively support the hiring of trained archivists at BIPOC-centered arts organizations. It is important that such archivists come from within the communities being represented and served by the arts organizations.
4. Archivists working for community archives, university archives, and other types of repositories should proactively reach out to BIPOC-centered arts organizations to gauge when partnerships with archives are desired, and when they are, they should craft creative practices that enable archival autonomy.

Introduction

Stuffed in boxes stacked in closets and basements, stored on distributed Google Cloud servers and on corporate-owned social media platforms, materials documenting the creative output of BIPOC communities in the U.S. are in danger of being lost. BIPOC-centered arts organizations produce records that are essential to advancing their important missions, to inspiring new works of art, and to understanding the history and culture of the United States. Yet much of this irreplaceable material exists in a perpetual state of precarity. Many arts organizations lack the time, expertise, and resources to steward their own materials. At the same time, archival repositories at predominantly white institutions have neglected to collect materials from BIPOC communities for centuries. The result is a gap in the historical record that is being magnified by the minute. Many BIPOC-centered arts organizations are responding to this crisis with characteristic creativity, but training, resources, and partnerships are needed to sustain this work over time.

To provide one illustrative example, the head of a nearly 60-year-old Black music organization (who preferred not to be named in writing) discussed how faith in the power of art to communicate across generations drives her organization's preservation efforts. Staff and volunteers at the organization recently moved decades of performance recordings into a climate-controlled storage facility after years of precarious storage:

Faith in the power of [art]... is what has sustained us and kept us here through many changes, through floods in basements where archives were held. "Oh, water's coming in. Somebody's got to get a truck and we got to get this out of here." And then it went to somebody else's basement, and then it went to somebody else's basement. So I said, No more basements. No more basements. It's gotta get into a [more permanent] space. We cannot risk that this valuable content could be destroyed by water.

When asked why these materials are important and to whom, she responded that young Black musicians need to know the history of the organization:

There are probably thousands of young musicians who want to make music. They want to make it different. They're looking at institutions, and they're like... "Where do I go to study this?" They don't know that there is an organization that was founded by people that look like them that's out there.

Finally, she stressed that,

Everybody needs to know this story, so that everybody can say "Oh,... there was this organization of people who, out of nothing, made something." As she summarized, and as many of this study's participants confirmed, the work of preserving the history of BIPOC-centered arts organizations is both urgent and crucial.

We present this report in the spirit of “no more basements”—that is, the hope that precious materials documenting the history of BIPOC-centered arts organizations will be valued, preserved, and made accessible, to both community members and a wider audience. Working toward that goal will take collective effort across arts organizations and all types of archives, and involve collaboration between administrators, artists, and archivists. As this report confirms, there will be no single strategy or one-size-fits-all solution to preserving the records of BIPOC arts in the U.S.; instead, documentation and preservation strategies must reflect the unique needs and context of each community and each arts organization.

This report is the second part of a two-part study that assesses the impact of archival representation on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)-centered arts organizations, led by the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) and funded by The Wallace Foundation. SAADA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with the mission to create a more inclusive society by giving voice to South Asian Americans through documenting, preserving, and sharing stories that represent their unique and diverse experiences.

This report builds on the findings of a survey of 113 BIPOC-centered arts organizations across the United States conducted by Thuy Vo Dang of the UCLA Community Archives Lab. Key findings from that survey indicated that: BIPOC-centered arts organizations value and prioritize the preservation of their history; grassroots organizations require more financial support; time, resources, and skills are primary areas to address; BIPOC-centered arts organizations are documenting and preserving their history based on resources at hand; partnerships with archival institutions are potentially effective; and collaboration with academic institutions is generally desired, but requires sensitivity.

Based on these survey findings, SAADA and the authors of this report sought additional qualitative data through in-depth semistructured interviews and focus groups with select executive directors and key staff and board members at BIPOC-centered arts organizations who participated in the survey.

In consultation with the UCLA Community Archives Lab research partners, SAADA

identified the following overarching research questions to guide this project:

- **What resources or interventions do BIPOC-centered arts organizations need in order to document, preserve, and share their own histories?**
- **What affective and redistributive impact does archival representation (or lack thereof) have on arts communities of color?**
- **How can documentation practices enacted by BIPOC artists and arts organizations challenge dominant archival practices and envision new liberatory archival practices?**
- **What possibilities and pitfalls do the various approaches for archival representation (i.e., self-documentation, partnerships with community-based archives, or contributing to mainstream repositories) have for BIPOC-centered arts organizations?**

Methodology

To help answer these research questions, we engaged in a community-led participatory action research (PAR) project. PAR is an iterative process by which communities play leading roles in every aspect of research design and implementation, from formulating research questions to analyzing data.¹ Community-led PAR has been used within archival studies by several teams of researchers who simultaneously design research inquiries and create or maintain archival projects alongside community members.² Working within the context of Indigenous communities in Australia, Shannon Faulkhead uses the term “negotiated methodologies” to describe formulating a research design that meets the needs of marginalized communities and fully reflects their own autonomous epistemologies and research methodologies.³ In this case, the research questions, project design, and implementation emerged from a partnership between SAADA and the UCLA Community Archives Lab.

We collected detailed qualitative data through two methods: one-on-one interviews and focus groups. Participants were drawn from the list of 113 viable survey participants from the first phase of this study. Out of the 113 viable survey participants, 101 responded affirmatively to the following question:

Would you or a representative from your organization be interested in participating in an additional component of this paid research study, either as part of a 1.5-hour focus group or a 45-minute one-on-one interview? Participants will be compensated \$150 for their time.

Working together from this list, the first two authors of this report identified potential participants, balancing geographic distribution, racial and ethnic diversity, and range of experiences partnering (or not partnering) with academic researchers and external archives. Once potential participants were identified on these factors, we randomly assigned them to either interviews or focus groups.

For recruitment of interview subjects, we emailed a total of 26 potential respondents,

1 Jacques M. Chevalier and Daniel J. Buckles, *Participatory Action Research: Theory and Methods for Engaged Inquiry* (Routledge, 2013).

2 Gregory Rolan et al., “Voice, Agency, and Equity: Deep Community Collaboration in Record-Keeping Research,” *Information Research* 24, no. 3 (2019): 1-7.

3 Shannon Faulkhead, “Negotiated Methodologies: Designing Research Respectful of Academic and Indigenous Traditions,” *Research in the Archival Multiverse* (Monash University Press, 2016), p. 479-515.

15 of whom responded affirmatively. The third author of this paper interviewed these 15 respondents via Zoom from October to November 2023. (The semistructured interview protocol is available in the Appendix.) With participants' permission, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were uploaded in NVivo and subsequently coded for recurring themes. These provisional codes were then shared with the focus group team to help guide the analysis of focus group data.

For recruitment of focus group subjects, we contacted a total of 33 potential participants, nine of whom eventually attended a focus group session. There was a small amount of overlap (two organizations) between the interview subjects and the focus group participants. The second and fourth authors of this report conducted three focus group sessions via Zoom in November and December 2023. (The focus group protocol is also available in the Appendix.) With the permission of focus group participants, the sessions were recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were subsequently coded for recurring themes, looking for overlapping themes between focus groups and interviews using the provisional codes developed from the interview data.

This study was approved as exempt from full review by UCLA's Institutional Review Board. All participants gave written consent. Some participants gave consent to be cited by name, while others chose that their names and those of their organizations remain confidential. The findings reported below reflect those differing choices.

This research fits squarely within an interpretivist research paradigm that presupposes reality to be socially constructed. In an interpretivist research paradigm, it is critical for researchers to acknowledge their positionality, as positionality influences what research questions can be asked, what data is collected, and how that data is interpreted. The first author of this paper is a white woman originally from a working-class background. She co-founded SAADA and has been actively engaged in research about SAADA and other community archives sites for the past 15 years. The second author of this report is a first-generation Caribbean American woman with a background in the performing arts who has studied and worked with performance archives for over a decade. The third author of this paper is a white woman from a middle-class background who has worked as an archivist, oral historian, and community organizer. The fourth author of this paper is a Black trans man from a middle-class background who has worked as an archivist within a seminary library and has studied social ethics and theology for the past decade. Some of us are insiders to some of the communities we studied, and others are outsiders; we acknowledge that our positionalities impacted the data we collected and our interpretation of that data.

Key Findings

The same key themes emerged from the interviews and the focus groups, both of which are reported together below. Although there was a wide range of responses, several recurring general themes emerged:

1. **The importance of preservation:** With some notable exceptions from newly established nonprofits, preserving organizational history was very important to most participating BIPOC-centered arts organizations.
2. **The precarity of materials:** Organizational records, both analog and digital, are precariously stored and in danger of being lost.
3. **Challenges with partnerships:** With some exceptions, partnerships between BIPOC-centered arts organizations and external archives have been fleeting and unsustainable, with many established archives shifting the burden of funding such partnerships onto the already financially burdened arts organiza-

tions, who are often left with little to show for their efforts and resources at the end of the partnership.

- 4. The continuum between autonomy and partnership:** There is a real need both for the time, labor, resources, and expertise to archive materials in house and for partnerships with external archives that enable narrative and archival autonomy.

We report details of each finding below, presenting in-depth qualitative data from the interviews and focus groups to illustrate these themes.

Theme 1.

The importance of preservation

With some notable exceptions from newer nonprofits, preserving organizational history was very important to most participating BIPOC-centered arts organizations.

Most participating arts administrators, particularly those who worked for well-established organizations, said they placed high importance on their organization's history. They spoke of their organization's work as both meaningful and historic, to both their own community and to the general public. Internally, they see preservation of their work as crucial for the organization's own internal administration, for reports to funders, and for continuity in the face of leadership changes. Externally, they see preservation of their work as crucial for educating and inspiring younger generations of artists, organizers, and administrators in their community, and for being recognized in history more broadly.

1a. Some newer organizations do not see archiving as a priority.

While most arts administrators we spoke to place a high value on the history of their organizations, some administrators from newly established organizations said they did not yet see the historic value of their work or did not yet have the capacity to preserve their records.

For example, Jaime Hernández co-founded Teatro Chelsea, a bilingual theater company serving Central American immigrants in Massachusetts, in 2020. When asked if Teatro Chelsea was documenting its own history, Hernández responded:

I would say, right now, our archives, and the thought of archiving, has not been a super pertinent issue. But I could see how in the future, when we (a) have more resources and (b) are growing, it would be more difficult to upkeep our own archives. . . . For us, when we have more people on the team, I could see that it will be of use. But right now, at least where we're at, . . . I don't think it would be the most pertinent thing to put our energies towards.

For Hernández, the day-to-day work of establishing a theater company and fulfilling organizational mission takes priority over thinking historically about the organization.

Similarly, the executive director of a nearly 20-year-old Arab American arts organization (who preferred not to be named) said documenting the organization's history would be "navel-gazing." He continued:

I don't think [archiving] would be a good use of our resources, considering the work that we do. For me to take up our time and our labor . . . to document ourselves rather than document the community we're supposed to be working for and for whose existence, for whose empowerment and development and advancement we're supposed to exist, . . . I would feel like . . . the self-interest would not be justified. So, I would not be persuaded to do this

anytime soon, because I don't think that [the organization] is in a position to claim that somehow. . . . I can think of 20 activities that I could probably jot down in five minutes that would exceed [archiving] in priority in terms of what we could do now with the resources we've got.

As these two arts administrators made clear, some newer organizations do not have the bandwidth to think about preserving their histories given the daily demands of creating and sustaining their work.

1b. For many other arts organizations, documenting their histories is important, but they often do not have the time, funding, labor, and expertise to archive their own work.

Contrary to the previous two respondents, many administrators do value preserving organizational materials, but lack the capacity to currently do so in a premeditated way. Here, a tension surfaced between valuing community history and having the capacity to preserve that history in-house. A real need was expressed to learn best practices and to be able to hire staff who can enact those best practices.

As one executive director of an Asian American arts organization summarized, preserving heritage was a “focus” of their work, yet “nonprofits like us, usually we don't really have any money or resources to really think about archiving our history.” She continued:

I think it's important. . . for the next generation, because when the founders founded the initial organization. . . it was to benefit the community. The type of challenges they had we're still facing. It's racism, it's gentrification, it's displacement. So I want to tell that story. . . . And there's still the same issues: there's racism, and there's homelessness. There's a really underrepresented community [here]. So I think those [lessons] will teach the next generation about what to look for, if we're forming another organization. . . or forming another nonprofit to serve [the community]. I think that would be really helpful.

Yet, despite a keen awareness of the importance of organizational history to community members, she also spoke of a lack of expertise about how best to preserve that history. Describing how staff and volunteers started digitizing photographs and documents because they ran out of physical storage space for analog materials, she said:

We just started scanning them, because we didn't want to just throw them away, because it is part of history. But at the same time, we didn't know what to do with them.

Several participants echoed this tension between the big picture of valuing history and the smaller picture of not having the capacity to practically steward historical materials on a daily basis. As one head of a Black arts organization said about unique recordings housed at her organization:

I'm embarrassed to say it, but. . . we don't know what to do. We're doing the best with what we have. I'm trying to make sure that nothing is in a cardboard box and nothing is on top of something that would bend it or twist it. But really, it's time for it to move into a place where, when somebody wants to look at it, it's neat.

Another participant from a different Black arts organization described recently listening to a panel discussion about Black collections that had been donated to external archives but have since been deaccessioned, undescribed, inaccessible, or lost. Her takeaway message from that event was “Keep everything.” She then said, “Oh, man, I understand this is important, but how do I do that?”

Another executive director aptly summarized many participants' attitude toward documenting organizational history:

You know, we're too busy with running our affairs, one. Two, we're too small and we don't have the capacity or the resources. Three... there would be some learning involved about what do we save, where do we save it, what don't we save, and the like. So, it has occurred to me [to organize materials], but I haven't prioritized it... However, I do think it's a project worthwhile for the future.

Many participants directly asked our research team for advice about best practices in archiving materials and for referrals to archivists who could help manage materials. However, lack of funding to do archival work was raised by several participants as a significant barrier to hiring outside experts.

1c. Administrators of Black arts organizations in particular want their history to be recognized and feel a sense of potential loss and the possibility of historical erasure.

For several of the Black arts organizations we spoke to, there was a palpable fear of historical erasure due to ongoing anti-Black racism in the current political climate. As one organizational leader described, "There is an urgency... with what happened in Florida and people snatching books out of libraries and schools, like this could turn into something very different." She went on to describe how the African and African American roots of some musical instruments and traditions were being erased such that they were being described in public venues and in published work as solely "American" rather than African American. Stressing the importance of Black narrative autonomy, she commented, "The person telling the story is so important. The person that's sharing the history is so important."

Leaders of some Black arts organizations articulated a sense of disbelief that their materials had not already been acquired by museums and archives. As one asked incredulously and rhetorically, "In my opinion, for us to be such a significant, not-for-profit, artists-run organization, to not be in the Black Smithsonian?" Our data surfaced that Black arts administrators have both a real sense of knowing the value of their own materials and an indignation that formal institutions have not yet recognized this value through acquisition.

The importance of Black history in the face of historical erasure was also emphasized by Ashleigh Gordon, artistic director of Castle of Our Skins, a Black cultural organization founded in 2013 and based in Roxbury, Massachusetts. Gordon placed her organization's history in a long lineage of the history of Black art in the U.S. and beyond. She said:

The nature of my work is all based on other histories, and knowledge of other histories, of knowing 500 years plus of Black existence in this field that I occupy. And that all has to do with history and research and going to archives and finding possibilities, like literally seeing possibilities. To know that this is a reality, this can be a reality. To feel bolstered, to know that this is a lineage, there is strength to be garnered from other people's work, for sure. Representation is huge. And again, having stories, moments, memories to be able to access in my own narrative telling of this organization, this work. All of that is hugely important as a concept, and I and this organization will be someone else's history at some point. And knowing that hopefully there's some of those, if not all of those, levels of connections that I have had with history, that someone else will have with this.

For Black arts organizations in particular, there was a real sense of the historic nature of their organization's work, both placing themselves in a past lineage of Black creative

practice and wanting to make their own histories accessible for Black artists of the future.

One respondent, the director of a Caribbean community arts organization in Philadelphia, spoke about the importance of both documenting and sharing the experiences of Black immigrants. She stressed that the cultures of Caribbean people have been misunderstood and that making sure that immigrants are well represented—and protected—is important. Describing a planned upcoming exhibit of archival materials, she said:

[Our next] project is going to be about the “barrel.” . . . One of the key things that [Caribbean immigrants] use is a barrel to send home to loved ones and friends and family. Things that they can use, like clothing and other necessities. We’re currently working on that to really let people know the importance of immigrants’ [experiences] when they do come here. There are two types of barrel. There’s one that’s cardboard. . . and we have the blue [rain] barrel, which is more industrial. So we’re gonna have artwork, but the artwork is gonna reflect different countries and it’s gonna be like the barrel is gonna represent some global heritage sites around the Caribbean and all that stuff, and some of the things that we have done in the past. How we’ve contributed! What is sugar? The sugarcane, rum that comes from Barbados, all those things—that exhibit is gonna reflect that. . . . We’re also gonna be focusing on mental health and grief and loss of parents, how people are impacted by the migration process.

Another respondent, the founder of a Black theater company in Los Angeles, also spoke about how important documenting the history of her organization is to younger Black artists and administrators. She said:

I know how important it is. . . for others to see. . . . More people of color are. . . coming into the art world. . . , but when I first started, I would walk into a room and I’d be the only one, the only Black woman [who] had their own organization and was doing arts education. . . . It also is really important that [young Black artists] know that it’s possible. . .

She then described how younger Black artists ask her for advice on how to start and sustain a nonprofit organization and how helpful it would be to have an organizational archive to which they could be directed to learn how to “stand the test of time.” She said: “I really hope that before I leave the planet, this will be archived.” As these interviews demonstrated, clearly there is a desire among many Black organizations to have their history be preserved.

1d. Some organizations use publishing (books, CDs, digital files) of written works and performances as an important archiving strategy.

Many participating organizations have turned to publishing materials rather than or in addition to preserving original records. Publishing serves not only to disseminate art to a wider audience, but also as a perceived strategy for long-term preservation. For example, Ashleigh Gordon from Castle of Our Skins described how her organization has begun to publish recordings, music scores, and curriculum guides. She said,

We’re not a publishing or distribution company per se, we don’t have that as our business model, but we’re creating material things. And so how do we document those material things? The Library of Congress, being able to register [publications there], I have yet to do this, but thinking about documenting beyond our tenure that these things have existed, these publications have existed.

Similarly, producers of the popular performance called *Yoni Ki Baat* (inspired by *The*

Vagina Monologues) have recently published a book as a way of documenting their work. Vandana Makker is a founding member of the organization South Asian Sisters, which produced the original *Yoni Ki Baat* show. Makker said:

Since the very beginning, we had the idea that we should take the pieces—... each monologue was written by a different woman—... and over the years, we just accumulated so many good pieces. So, we were like, Okay, we need to create a book of... pieces that really resonated and... show the diversity of experiences.... At first we explored different options in terms of publishing. But in the end, I just felt like if we don't just do it, we're never going to do it. So we decided to go the self-publishing route through Amazon, because it's very straightforward. And so we're almost done now; we're just waiting on the cover art to be finalized.

She went on to describe how the book is a way of preserving the monologues that have been physically and digitally dispersed across authors, performances, and organizers.

In the absence of formal archival training, publishing has become a way for several organizations to ensure that at least some of their creative output will have longevity. Without knowing it, these organizations have embodied the archival principle that “lots of copies keep stuff safe.”

1e. Some organizations post materials to their websites and other third-party sites as a documentation strategy.

Some organizations have relied on strategies such as documenting their work on websites or other third-party sites like Google Drive in the absence of formal archives or successful partnerships (for more on how these third-party practices lead to precarity, please see Finding 2b). While these organizations often recognize that documenting their organizational history in this manner is neither a reliable or a trustworthy archival practice, they do see it as a step toward achieving their longer archiving goals. As the director of an Indian cultural society shared:

We don't have a scientific way of preserving it except for CDs and laptops and computers. And, you know, most of them are in CDs, because [when we were founded] CDs were the easiest way to store the major events. So almost every year's event has been recorded and kept, for the possibility that anybody wants [to see it]. They can access it, and they can look at it, and it has been used many times in a lot of news media.... Besides that, we don't have anything major. We put some on our websites, too, but then, you know, there's a limitation as to how much you can store there. So mostly [our records] are all in CDs, and some in our websites, too.

Another participant, from a Brazilian arts organization, explained that they had chosen to use Google Drive to store and document their work because it allowed them to both conduct a preliminary records survey and share digital records across geographical borders. In describing her process and the thinking behind it, she said:

I did, like, a massive push of all of our digital information in Google Drive. And just so it was a place that was shareable across the team. You know, also recognizing I work with folks in Brazil. So like, literally, we needed something that could exist in a lot of different places simultaneously in our founder's home. [Our founder] had a lot of videos, pictures, you know, things dating back to the seventies that needed to at least be separated from her personal stuff. So there had been a huge organization[al effort], because I did also for some time work out of...her house as a home office. So that at least began a process of understanding, like, what is our archive.

Finally, Jaime Hernández, co-founder of Teatro Chelsea, told the research team that while he uses his computer and Google Drive to document and store materials, he realizes that this is an unsustainable practice. He said that for their organization:

Data and documents were being held in an Airtable that was created, then went on to Google Drive. But, you know, I would say documenting and archiving is something that isn't. We have [the materials]. But, like, at this point, I feel like it's all over the place. I'm like, "Oh, shoot! Where's this document? I gotta, like, look." ... It's all on my computer. I never delete anything, but in terms of the organization, it's all sporadic. Most of the stuff is on the Google Drive. But, you know, there's bound to be things that are always going to be forgotten.

Theme 2. The precarity of materials

Materials are precarious and in danger of being lost.

The second overarching theme that our interviews and focus groups surfaced was the precarity of organizational records. Without the time, labor, expertise, and resources to steward them, both analog and digital materials were dispersed and in danger of being lost. Digital records pose a particular challenge, as there is little awareness that commercial cloud storage and social media platforms do not constitute sustainable preservation solutions in and of themselves. We thus found an overreliance on cloud storage and social media as archiving strategies and a misunderstanding that these platforms provide a long-term preservation solution when indeed they do not.

2a. Older organizations with analog records are running out of space for physical storage in their offices. These materials are piled up in office closets or in the homes of founders, board members, and volunteers. As such, they are at risk of rapid deterioration.

In our introductory example, materials from one organization were moved from basement to basement until they were eventually prioritized and moved to climate-controlled storage. Another example comes from Anne Edmunds, an administrator at the Philadelphia Clef Club of Jazz and Performing Arts. When asked what the biggest challenge is to housing archival materials on-site, she said:

I would say storage. ... There are issues with the building. In this particular archive, they have to make sure that it's properly climate controlled and cared for. The space is not that large. So as [the archive] grows, it's going to need a separate space from the existing [space] instead of taking up a large portion of the building. They use the building primarily for instruction and training, some music studios. I think that probably what will happen is they will house that collection off-site.

Several organizations are currently considering moving analog materials off-site due to lack of storage space in their organizational offices. However, many lack the funding to pay for off-site climate-controlled storage, so materials could be further endangered by being dispersed to community members' homes.

2b. More recent records are largely born-digital and placed in commercial cloud storage (like Google Drive) and made accessible on social media platforms (like YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook).

Our data surfaced the potential for disastrous archival loss here. While these digital spaces provide access, from an archival perspective they do not come with long-term

preservation commitments and are viable only as long as they make a profit for corporate shareholders. Yet many arts organization leaders referred to the use of these commercial platforms as an archiving strategy. Materials are being placed in these platforms in lieu of a more sustainable digital preservation strategy because of their low cost and ease of use.

Kavin Sanghavi, a programming director for the South Asian Performing Arts Network (SAPAN), described how digital materials are dispersed across commercial cloud storage and social media platforms:

Administratively, our articles of incorporation, tax documentation, all that sort of stuff we maintain with Google Drive cloud storage platform. But from a creative standpoint, we pretty much store everything [online]. Primarily YouTube and Instagram are our platforms where we go to when we're looking for what our organization has done in the past. You know, the first place we go is YouTube. We might have, like, some raw video files and some raw photo files in our Google Drive, and I think that's primarily more from like... older leadership when cloud storage wasn't as common. But I think now we've pretty much shifted; everything is on a social media platform. So not necessarily like storage in a traditional sense, I'd say, but that's where we go to find everything that we've done.

The executive director of a different Asian American arts organization similarly described her organization's digital recordkeeping practices:

It is all digital at this point, so we have online cloud server [space]. We archive photos and program planning documents and board meeting minutes there. Except for HR documents, everything is on the cloud, and then HR documents, finance, and accounting files are on a separate physical server.

One Caribbean community organization also struggles with digital recordkeeping, although it is clear that some BIPOC arts organizations are not aware of the precarity created by using third-party sites. Their director said:

We're currently in that process. Everything is everywhere, but we do have it together since we were asked by funders to get [all of the documentation] that they needed. It's in different parts of the computer, and so Facebook has also been a good place to document a lot of the things that we do. And we usually even send people to our Facebook page to let people know the latest updates that we've had. So it's a good way of recording as well; we've had videos and all these different things.

Some of these digital records management strategies also rely precariously on a single person to administer them. Vandana Makker of South Asian Sisters described,

I'm kind of the holder of all of the stuff; I would say I'm like the mom of this movement... It's all in my Google Drive, basically. I have everything... myself, which is a little scary.

She went on to describe how there was a loose affiliation of people and organizations that performed *Yoni Ki Baat*, such that "there's probably a wealth of other stuff out there."

And while the affiliates had talked about creating "a shared Google Drive or some kind of repository for everybody's stuff... we never did it."

Throughout the interviews and focus groups, it was quite telling that many participants referred to commercial cloud storage as an "archive," without a deeper understanding of the precarity of single copies of digital files in cloud storage. There is a pervasive

lack of awareness of sustainable digital preservation strategies, in turn jeopardizing more recent born-digital and digitized materials.

At least one organization spoke about losing digitized materials. Emma Draves is an administrator at Natya, a classical Indian dance organization in Chicago. Draves explained:

We actually did have an external hard drive go missing. We did a whole summer's worth of work [scanning materials], and then we had a change in admin staff. . . . The materials are at the founder's house, but there is an office [in the house] that is used for the company work there. We have a part-time admin who works in that office. And that's where the archives were being handled. We did a whole summer's worth of labor, and then within a year or two, the external hard drive that the material had gone into went missing, and we still don't know where it is. It's just—it's gone. So maybe someday we'll find it. But in any case, that was something we didn't want to happen.

Across organizations and formats, it is clear that invaluable materials are being stored in precarious environments, be they stacks of boxes in basements, single copies of digital files sitting on proprietary cloud storage or single external hard drives, and/or commercial social media platforms. While many administrators are aware of the potential risks of their current systems for storing analog materials, there is little knowledge of the preservation risks associated with cloud storage and social media platforms. This presents an urgent opportunity for archival intervention.

Theme 3. **Challenges with partnerships**

For many, partnerships with external archives have been fleeting.

Despite the unquestionable value of the historic materials that BIPOC arts organizations produce and steward, there have been few sustainable mutually beneficial partnerships between such organizations and external archives based in universities and museums to collect and preserve these materials. Our interviews and focus groups revealed that many administrators felt ignored by university and museum archives and/or cautious of potential partnerships with external archives and museums because of fears of extraction or exploitation. Many participants described experiences in which they were approached with interest from external archives or museums, but those institutions pushed the burden of fundraising for such collaborations onto the already financially stressed BIPOC arts organization. Yet many BIPOC-centered arts organizations we talked to—particularly older organizations that are going through leadership transitions—still want partnerships with external archives. However, they also want to maintain autonomy over their own records and history, revealing that such partnerships would necessitate creative archival arrangements like postcustodial practices.

3a. Many participating organizations are in conversations with external archives, but there have been very few long-standing mutually beneficial partnerships.

One administrator of a Black arts organization discussed being in conversations with the University of Chicago about a possible transfer of materials, but instead wanted the visibility of being included in the Smithsonian, which had not yet expressed interest in acquiring her organization's materials. Others addressed how they had been approached by university archives and museums, but noted that those conversations had not yet resulted in a partnership or acquisition. Still others discussed very limited relationships with academic researchers that produced a single end product like a white paper. Interestingly, none of the participants mentioned engaging in partner-

ships with independent, minoritized identity-based community archives.

One administrator who preferred not to be named discussed ongoing negotiations with an external archive. She said:

I would say on a scale of one to 10, our relationship is like at a seven. And it's because different leaders have different styles and some are a little... abrasive and some are gentle, and some are malleable. And I think that whatever happened, it didn't solidify. I don't know if it's the right place anyway, so sometimes things don't happen for a reason... It didn't happen. And I'm kind of glad it didn't happen, because I want to be [at another bigger, more prestigious institution]. I want to be in a place where people can have access to us.

Another participant, from a Brazilian dance organization, noted that relationships with external archives also often feel incomplete and can be fraught. She noted:

With [the University of Southern California], it was like "Just pick some things and just give us a few." And there was [nothing else]; it was really as simple as digitizing. And again, I don't even know what happened after that point—I don't even know who that person is or where that information lives. How can we utilize that? So I think that it was more that we fit into their goals, and then it sort of was a checked box.

3b. Some participating organizations look at external archives with suspicion. Sometimes, this suspicion is due to a poor track record of caring for BIPOC collections. Sometimes, BIPOC-centered organizations fear they will have to give up narrative autonomy along with custody of materials.

Ashleigh Gordon from Castle of Our Skins highlighted the relationship between archival neglect of BIPOC communities, the precarity of digital storage, and the use of publishing as an archival strategy. She said:

We don't have relationships with a library or an archive. Knowing too, as it relates to Black cultural work, that at so many of these archival spaces for Black music research, in Chicago and at various institutions, like Howard, etc., archives were stewarded and shepherded and then disbanded. So that material [is lost]... Knowing how fickle... [these institutions are] as they relate to Black archives, how fickle those archives actually are for sustaining [Black arts materials]. So then, does literally everything have to be in the cloud, and the cloud will live on forever? I don't know, I don't have answers, but we have thought about it, especially as it relates to publishing material things.

Another executive director described how she would approach building a relationship with an external archive with caution, saying, "I would also have to know that the organization is trustworthy, because the stories are so personal."

3c. When there is a partnership with an external archive, the burden of fundraising is often pushed onto the arts organizations, which often do not have access to additional capital to support archival work.

For example, Anne Edmunds from the Philadelphia Clef Club described a mutually beneficial partnership with the Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection at Temple University, which is temporarily storing some of their materials on loan while the Clef Club's building is being renovated. However, as Edmunds explained, even after the Clef Club's building is renovated,

The Philadelphia Clef Club will not oversee its own collection. It will partner with the Charles Blockson to assure that [the collection] is properly

documented and digitized. And so they're handling all of that for the Philadelphia Clef Club.

Yet, even in this successful partnership, the burden of paying for it falls to the arts organization. As Edmunds described,

The Philadelphia Clef Club has to fundraise as part of their operating and program budget. . . . They would pay and their arrangements [with Temple University] would be contractual. . . . So that arrangement comes from fundraising. In other words, [the Philadelphia Clef Club] would need to have grants to support that partnership.

Yet many organizations spoke about a lack of fiscal resources to support archival work. University and museum archives are generally better positioned to apply for grant funding than relatively small BIPOC-centered arts organizations. Furthermore, many university and museum repositories pay white artists for their collections, which are widely recognized to have fiscal value, so it is unclear why, other than racism, materials documenting art created by BIPOC artists are so undervalued.

In Philadelphia, a Black arts organization recently partnered with Drexel University to create a documentation project and exhibit. The first step for the organization, however, was to complete a grant proposal that demanded quite a lot from an already short-staffed, overburdened, and underresourced organization. In order to participate in the grant application process, the organization had to locate several documents, create others, and provide evidence of their impact on the community. While these steps might be necessary for any small arts organization, that this work was a prerequisite for any actual support from a university paints a stark picture of how steep the barrier for entry is for BIPOC community partners on institutionally led grant projects.

3d. Still, many BIPOC arts organizations want partnerships, but they also want to maintain their autonomy over the records and would need creative arrangements like postcustodial practices.

This is especially true for older organizations that are going through leadership transitions. When substantial partnerships with external archives do exist, they reflect creative and nondominant archival practices that enable arts organizations to maintain autonomy.

Sheri Neale, co-founder and board chair of Maroon Arts Group, a Black arts and culture organization in Columbus, Ohio, described a successful ongoing partnership with the Ohio History Center, which routinely collects materials from the organization. Yet Neale also expressed a desire to house some of her collections on-site at her organization's offices, suggesting the possibility of a postcustodial partnership in the future.

Tying these themes together, Emma Draves from Natya, an Indian dance organization, described how a unique partnership between her arts organization and the Newberry Library developed. She said,

The Newberry Library in Chicago started building their dance archives and reached out to the community announcing this program. So I connected with them and said, You know, we have the Natya archives, and to have them stored in your firesafe, temperature-controlled spaces would be ideal. And they agreed to that, and we had the handshake on the agreement, which is wonderful. However. . . to our founder, these things, these items, are precious to her, right? They're her life. So just handing them over wasn't something she was comfortable with. So then we started writing grants to support a more official [internal] archival program and activities. And we did receive grants to

support that. Right now we are using actual professional, went-to-school-for-it archivists, and they are digitizing as many of the archives frankly as we can afford right now. . . . Where it stands right now is we have external hard drives that hold that information.

The next step that we need to get to is to build the iCloud. . . to store it in the cloud, because we want to have three things: the hard archives, the external hard drive digitization, and also an iCloud library version. And then we will copy all of the digital archive external hard drive material and give it to the Newberry. I'm also hopeful that we will. . . also be giving them copies whenever we have copies of the hard materials. . . . But the single-copy, more personal pieces are going to stay with our founder; she's not comfortable handing them over. . . . She's gonna hold on to those. So that's kind of where we are in the process. We've got a while to go, but. . . I think the formality of having an outside firm to do the digitization has really, really helped us.

Draves touched on so many aspects of our conversations across organizations: caution about handing materials over to larger archival institutions; the need to raise funds to digitize materials in-house; the desire for partnerships that enable BIPOC-centered organizations to maintain autonomy over their materials and, by extension, their histories. Draves also displayed a nuanced understanding of digital preservation, which her organization learned the hard way, after losing the only digital copies made of files. While there is still an ultimate desire to collaborate with an outside archive for access and recognition, these partnerships call for creativity and shared authority beyond many still-dominant archival practices that assume a hard-and-fast transfer of custody from the organization to the archive.

Theme 4.

The continuum between autonomy and partnership

Our fourth major finding surfaced a tension between the need for, on the one hand, the time, labor, resources, and expertise to archive materials in-house within arts organizations and, on the other hand, mutually beneficial partnerships with external archives.

For us, these findings were not contradictory, but rather revealed how each organization will need to develop an archival strategy that best meets its own needs and responds to its own contexts. In many cases, a combination of better internal record-keeping and archives management practices and relationship-building with external archives will best meet the long-term preservation needs of the arts organization and best serve to preserve these critical histories moving forward.

4a. Some participants described wanting more archival skills and dedicated staff to manage their materials internally.

Kioto Aoki, an administrator at Asian Improv aRts Midwest, a Chicago-based organization dedicated to the preservation of Japanese traditional performing arts, best summed up the need for BIPOC-centered arts organizations to maintain their own collections:

The best way to preserve the proper history is to do it yourself as much as you can. And there are pros and cons to that, of course, in terms of scale and visibility and legibility and those concerns. But I think that we're also the best advocate for what we do. And so that, for me, also is important, and when, if and when, [our history] is picked up by someone else, that our philosophies and our stance is preserved in the proper way. But I think it's important, and it is a part of learning from history, of recognizing that who is writing the histo-

ries and who is making the archive makes a big difference. That's why things are omitted or things are lost. . .

One participant described “lack of knowledge” as a barrier to maintaining digital files, mentioning the absence of “a suitable structure or database” and asking, “What kind of tools can we use?” To have an archivist on staff or an archival consultant on contract to answer those questions, or to have training sessions with archivists, would be beneficial to many organizations.

Luis Antonio Pichardo, executive director of DSTL Arts, described needing dedicated staff and funding to properly archive materials in-house:

Realistically, I would need another person. . . that can be dedicated to that task, a person that can help usher me through the process. I don't mind putting in some amount of input into what should be archived and what maybe doesn't need to be, or I can provide the backstory to certain things. I mean, a person that is prepared for [archival work], that knows how to do it, that would be a huge benefit for sure. And, of course, resources in terms of funding. It requires payment for their services. . . . As it is now, DSTL Arts is always just very tight on cash, you know. And just like very many small nonprofits, I have just enough to pay the staff that I have and cover the costs of our programs. And that's it. Like, you know, cash reserves and that kind of thing just don't exist for us most of the time.

If there were external funding to support archival staff to work in-house and/or archival training for organizational staff, most participating arts organizations would welcome those opportunities.

Emma Draves from Natya explained how her organization had tried and failed for decades to create a sustainable digital preservation strategy. She said:

I really wish we hadn't lost material. We've probably wasted. . . \$10,000 over 20 years of people trying to do the right thing, and it just was not right. I mean, the problem with digitization is technology's always changing. And at some point, you just have to say, “Okay, now; we'll do it now.” So in some ways, you know, what could be done? We didn't know. But it is a little frustrating, because as an arts organization, you never have enough money. If only I could have that [\$10,000] back. But I think that did teach us that we just needed to make the goal and put both feet in, in terms of contracting with someone knowledgeable [to do archival work]. I think we also didn't realize how much time it was gonna take.

Like really, it's not simple and it's totally ongoing, because, of course, we've generated another year's worth of archives now that we've kind of started the process. So to attack that, then it would be some other [year] we're gonna have to come up with another system of ongoing check-ins. Like, once a year we send in that year's material. Ideally, you know, that would be ideal. And it might just be my knowledge and lack of expertise. I need a little bit more time, but I'm guessing there are some funding opportunities that might work like that. I just maybe need to suss them out, something that would be a dependable way to get some sort of base funding on an annual basis to keep up the archives, maintain them, and add to them. And again, it's like another next step on top of other stuff.

It is clear that more skills, trained staff, and funding are needed for those organizations that want to manage their own digital materials sustainably.

4b. Other participants described a strong desire for reciprocal partnerships with

external archives.

Here, there was a range of options discussed, from total transfer of custody to the desire for ongoing postcustodial partnerships.

When asked if her organization had yet partnered with an external archive, one participant (who preferred not to be named) said, “No, but that’s my prayer. . . . We have a rich, rich history.” When Yvonne Nsabimana, executive director of Ngoma y’Africa Cultural Center in Utah, was asked if her organization had partnered with an external archive yet, she responded, “Unfortunately, no, and yeah, that is the dream.”

Similarly, reflecting a desire to transfer complete custody of materials, one theater director said:

I’d turn over everything. They can come and take a look at everything that we have. There’s a plethora of information, there’s tapes, there’s articles, . . . there’s a lot of history there. So I think you just have to do whatever the archivists do, and I’d help in any way to show them where things are and tell them a little bit more about the history. . . . Take control, just take control. You know, I’m not a control freak. I mean, as long as they feel that it’s important and they want to help us preserve, because I think it’s really important. I am really, really sending up smoke signals that I could find a way to do this.

Another participant, who works with an arts organization in North Carolina, had only one specific request of any partnership, which he felt was needlessly unmet:

My one requirement is that they digitize and make it available to the public. So the Library of Congress is one option, and there’s other ones. I mean there’s many, but I just need to make sure. I would think that would not be a hard thing for them to do, but it apparently takes a lot of money to [digitize], and they usually don’t find money to do that, but do find money for other things.

Other participants expressed a real interest in working with external archives but had little sense of what exactly that relationship might entail. There is clearly a need for external archives to conduct outreach to these arts organizations to inform them about the appraisal and acquisition process, as well as clearer communications about digitization of materials. Much more training is needed to teach these administrators how to negotiate with external archives for monetary compensation for collections, as well as how to craft legal agreements that enable them to maintain narrative autonomy over their histories.

Recommendations

Based on these themes, we make the following recommendations moving forward:

- 1. Archives and funding agencies need to pay more attention to and provide more care toward the records of BIPOC-centered arts organizations. These organizations house materials of immeasurable historical value that are in grave danger of being lost.** As this report demonstrates, BIPOC-centered arts organizations across the United States have rich and varied histories commensurate with the vast cultural diversity and cultural heritage they represent. Documenting these histories and art forms is important not only to the fabric of the nation, but also to the communities from which they emerge and in which they are practiced. The stakes and scale of potential cultural loss are too high to minimize the need to turn specific attention toward documenting these arts organizations, the work that they do, and the communities they serve.

- 2. Major effort should be put toward providing training for basic archival skills, including digital archival skills, to staff at BIPOC-centered arts organizations.** As learned through this study, a major intervention is needed with regard to the use of websites and third-party sites as “archives,” as this false conception increases the precarity of born-digital and digitized records. Proper training is necessary for those working at BIPOC-centered arts organizations in basic appraisal, representation, and preservation skills. Importantly, the BIPOC-centered arts organizations represented in this report have themselves identified this as a need. There is a clear sense that organizational staff are aware of the limitations of their extant knowledge in this area.
- 3. Funding agencies should actively support the hiring of trained archivists at BIPOC-centered arts organizations.** It is important that such archivists come from within the communities being represented and served by the arts organizations. Funding agencies should take note from this report that beyond equipping staff with basic archival skills, there is a strong and defined need for trained archivists to support BIPOC-centered arts organizations in their archival appraisal, representation, preservation, and exhibit goals (both analog and digital). Additionally, this report makes plain that because many BIPOC-centered arts organizations have had prior bad experiences working with archivists who do not know or understand their community’s cultural heritage and/or forms of artistic expression, it is important that the communities being served and represented by the arts organizations also be represented by or engaged with the archivists who support them.
- 4. Archivists working for community archives, university archives, and other types of repositories should proactively reach out to BIPOC-centered arts organizations to gauge when partnerships with archives are desired.** When such partnerships are desired, archivists should work to creatively craft arrangements that enable the organizations to have cultural and narrative autonomy over their collections. These partnerships should also center/prioritize the needs of BIPOC-centered arts organizations over the “wants” of the more established institutional partner, and special care must be taken when the institutional partner is a predominantly white institution (PWI). Importantly, archivists working for dominant institutions should seek fiscal parity when acquiring the collections of BIPOC-centered arts organizations—that is, paying those organizations for their collections as many archives pay white artists for their collections. Archivists should not push the burden of fundraising for the processing and preservation of archival collections onto already fiscally strapped BIPOC-centered arts organizations.

We know that these recommendations take resources and effort, but the historic value of the materials at risk warrants a concerted response.

Conclusion

This report is the result of 15 qualitative interviews and three focus groups designed to better understand the archival needs of BIPOC-centered arts organizations across the United States.

The study, which builds on the findings of a survey of 113 such organizations, provides key insights into not only the needs of these arts organizations, but also—in sharp relief—several important areas for immediate intervention. The study finds that there is an urgent need for archives and funding agencies to turn their archival eye toward the records of BIPOC-centered arts organizations. These organizations house materials of immeasurable historical value that are in grave danger of being lost.

There is also an urgent need to intervene with regard to the preservation of born-digital records; many of the arts organizations report using means and media that are either unstable or unsuitable for archival purposes, while control and ownership of these records too often lies with a third party, outside the purview of the organization itself. Perhaps most importantly, however, this study has uncovered a strong desire within BIPOC-centered arts organizations across the nation to document their histories and the work that they do in service to their communities. These organizations, while in various stages of preparedness, are urgently searching for a solution. That solution will take a concerted effort between BIPOC-centered arts administrators, funders, and professional archivists working for a range of organizations and institutions. Although our research has identified a major need, it also presents an opportunity to move forward to preserve the unique and irreplaceable cultural record created by BIPOC-centered arts organizations.

In conclusion, we return to our introductory anecdote about the nearly 60-year-old Black music organization that moved its records from basement to basement before renting a proper climate-controlled storage space for its invaluable collections. Our research surfaced so many similar organizations whose materials (both analog and digital) are precariously stored and in dire need of archival intervention. We advocate that partnerships with funding agencies and archives should move these organizations forward urgently, toward the goal of “no more basements.”

Appendix

Interview and Focus Group Protocol for BIPOC-Centered Arts Organizations

- Can you please introduce yourself?
- Can you say more about your organization's mission?
- Tell me about the history of your organization.
- How is this history preserved?
- Have you ever worked with an archive to record and preserve your organization's history? If so, was it a university archive or a community archive? If so, what was that experience like?
- Have you ever worked with an academic researcher to document or preserve your organization's history? In what capacity? If so, what was that experience like?
- What resources would you need to preserve your own documentation?
- What resources would you need to work with an established archive?
- Is there a place in your organization where historic documentation is kept?
- Is there a person whose role it is to keep historic documentation?
- What barriers do you face that prevent you from preserving your organization's history?
- Do you think preserving your organization's history is important? If so, why?
- Who might use your organization's historic records? How?
- Is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to address?

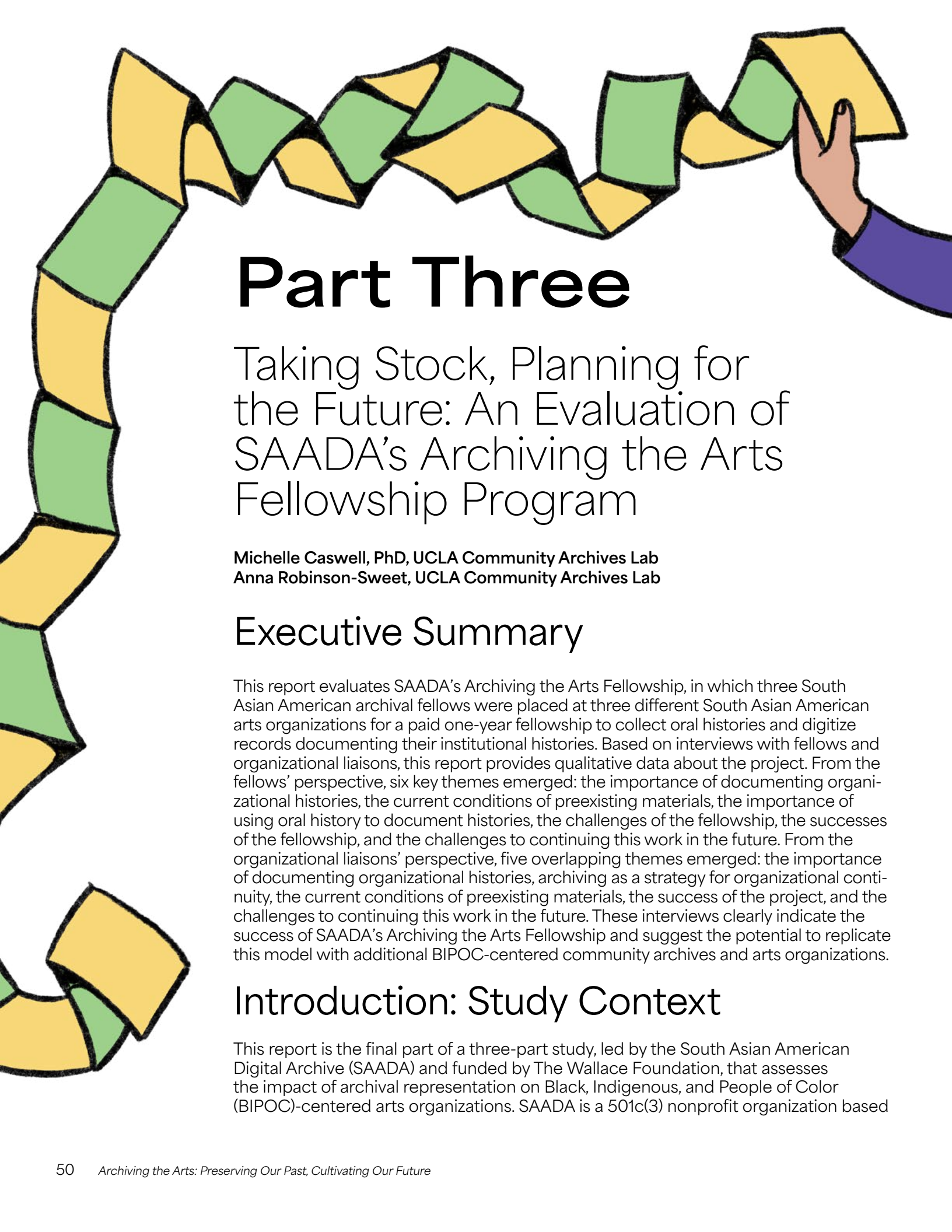
Additional questions if they have worked with an archive previously:

- Did you have a preexisting relationship with the individual documenting your organization's history? If so, how important was that in the project's success? If not, how did they build trust with you?
- How long did the archival project take in months? What was required from your organization to participate?
- Is there anything that happened in the documentation process that you wish were done differently?
- Anything we can learn about how the process worked, what worked well, what didn't work well will be helpful for our fellowship phase.

Additional questions if they have not worked with an archive previously:

- What stories or materials from your organization would you want preserved most?
- What do you think is most important in working with someone to document your organization's history? What skills, background, and relationship to your organization would be most ideal?

- If you were working with someone to document your organization's history, would you prefer to work with someone with whom you have an existing relationship? Would you be open to working with someone you don't have an existing relationship with? What would help them build trust with your organization?
- Is there anything that would make you uncomfortable in working with someone to document your organization's history?



Part Three

Taking Stock, Planning for the Future: An Evaluation of SAADA's Archiving the Arts Fellowship Program

Michelle Caswell, PhD, UCLA Community Archives Lab
Anna Robinson-Sweet, UCLA Community Archives Lab

Executive Summary

This report evaluates SAADA's Archiving the Arts Fellowship, in which three South Asian American archival fellows were placed at three different South Asian American arts organizations for a paid one-year fellowship to collect oral histories and digitize records documenting their institutional histories. Based on interviews with fellows and organizational liaisons, this report provides qualitative data about the project. From the fellows' perspective, six key themes emerged: the importance of documenting organizational histories, the current conditions of preexisting materials, the importance of using oral history to document histories, the challenges of the fellowship, the successes of the fellowship, and the challenges to continuing this work in the future. From the organizational liaisons' perspective, five overlapping themes emerged: the importance of documenting organizational histories, archiving as a strategy for organizational continuity, the current conditions of preexisting materials, the success of the project, and the challenges to continuing this work in the future. These interviews clearly indicate the success of SAADA's Archiving the Arts Fellowship and suggest the potential to replicate this model with additional BIPOC-centered community archives and arts organizations.

Introduction: Study Context

This report is the final part of a three-part study, led by the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) and funded by The Wallace Foundation, that assesses the impact of archival representation on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)-centered arts organizations. SAADA is a 501c(3) nonprofit organization based

in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the leading source for South Asian American history. SAADA's mission is to create a more inclusive society by giving voice to South Asian Americans through documenting, preserving, and sharing stories that represent their unique and diverse experiences.

This report builds off the findings of the previous two studies. In the first study, "Survey of BIPOC-Centered Arts Organizations' Archival Practices," Thuy Vo Dang surveyed 113 BIPOC-centered arts organizations across the United States. Key findings from that survey indicated that: BIPOC-centered arts organizations value and prioritize the preservation of their history; grassroots organizations require more financial support; time, resources, and skills are identified as primary areas to address; BIPOC-centered arts organizations are documenting and preserving their history based on resources at hand; partnerships with archival institutions are potentially effective; and collaborations with academic institutions are generally desired, but require sensitivity.

The second study, "No More Basements': A Qualitative Report on BIPOC-Centered Arts Organizations' Archival Practices and Needs," was subsequently conducted by UCLA researchers Michelle Caswell, Tonia Sutherland, Anna Robinson-Sweet, and James Epps. That study built on the survey findings through in-depth semistructured interviews and focus groups with select executive directors, key staff, and board members at BIPOC-centered arts organizations. This qualitative data surfaced the following themes: preserving organizational history was very important to most participating BIPOC-centered arts organizations; organizational records, both analog and digital, are precariously stored and in danger of being lost; partnerships between BIPOC-centered arts organizations and external archives have been fleeting and unsustainable; and there is both a real need for the time, labor, resources, and expertise to archive materials in house and for partnerships with external archives that enable narrative and archival autonomy. Based on these findings, the second report also included a series of recommendations, including: archives and funding agencies need to pay more attention to and provide more care for the records of BIPOC-centered arts organizations; major effort should be put toward providing training for basic archival skills, including digital archival skills, to staff at BIPOC-centered arts organizations; and funding agencies should actively support the hiring of trained archivists from within the communities served by BIPOC-centered arts organizations.

Based in part on the archival needs surfaced in these findings and with support from The Wallace Foundation, SAADA created a one-year fellowship program that placed three South Asian American archival fellows at three different South Asian American arts organizations to collect oral histories and digitize records documenting their institutional histories. Copies of these materials are being added to SAADA's postcustodial digital archive as the fellowship concludes. Fellows and arts organizations were selected as part of an open call in October 2024. (See Appendix 1 for application criteria and questions for fellows. See Appendix 2 for application criteria and questions for organizations.) There were 98 applications for the fellowship and 15 applications for participating arts organizations. Organizations were selected in March 2024. Fellows were selected in July 2024, with the fellowship starting in August 2024. In reviewing applications from organizations, SAADA staff were interested in working with diverse organizations that do different kinds of work, support different communities, and had varying lengths of establishment. More broadly, SAADA staff wanted to know why participation in this program was important to the organizations. For the fellows who applied, SAADA staff were interested in the reasons they wanted to work with that organization, how they could articulate their approach to the project, why participating in the fellowship would be meaningful for them personally, how they would navigate working with an organization that ultimately had final say on the project (including managing differences of opinion), and how they envisioned their role as an oral history interviewer.

The three selected arts organizations were The Music Circle, The South Asian Womxn's Creative Collective (SAWCC), and Twelve Gates Arts. Organizations were paid \$5,000 each for their participation.

Based in Southern California, The Music Circle's mission is to foster awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the classical music of South Asia by providing a supportive and inspiring platform for its leading exponents. Founded in 1973, The Music Circle presents eight concerts between September and June by internationally renowned masters as well as emerging artists from both South Asia and North America. The fellow selected for placement at The Music Circle was Avehi Menon, a Los Angeles-based oral historian and museum professional who previously worked at the Center for Public History in Bangalore, India. The Music Circle had some staffing changes leading up to the fellowship, but ultimately Artistic Director V.R. Venkataraman served as the organizational liaison.

SAWCC is a New York City-based nonprofit arts organization dedicated to the advancement, visibility, and development of emerging and established South Asian womxn artists and creative professionals by providing a physical and virtual space to profile their creative and intellectual work across disciplines. SAWCC has served South Asian womxn since 1997 and has earned a reputation for showcasing cutting-edge work that deals intelligently with issues of gender and cultural representation. SAWCC's public programs present the creative work of South Asian womxn in multiple disciplines through salons, talks, workshops, readings, screenings, performances, and exhibitions. The fellow placed at SAWCC was Shravya Kag, a photographer and documentarian based in Brooklyn. SAWCC's organizational liaison was board member Anjali Goyal.

Twelve Gates Arts, established in 2009, is a nonprofit organization based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and a leading platform for South Asian diasporic contemporary art. Rooted in cultural sustainability and equity, Twelve Gates Arts provides spaces to explore the realities of migration, identity, and cultural exchange. As the only gallery in the region dedicated to South Asian diasporic art, Twelve Gates Arts amplifies underrepresented voices and fosters meaningful engagement between artists, audiences, and communities. Twelve Gates Arts' fellow was Sibia Sarangan, a curator with a master's degree in curatorial studies from the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College. Twelve Gates Arts' co-founder and executive director Aisha Khan served as the organizational liaison.

Structure of the Fellowship

After organizations and fellows were selected, the yearlong fellowship began with an in-person kickoff event bringing together the three fellows, the three organizational liaisons, and SAADA staff. The meeting served as an onboarding to SAADA and SAADA's broader work, as well as an introduction to the specific goals, structure, and expectations of the project. It was also the first time the fellows and organizational liaisons met one another in person, though they had previously met virtually during the interview phase. During this meeting, SAADA staff, with oral history training led by Dr. Amber Abbas, also provided guidance on digitizing physical documents, including a live demonstration so fellows could see the process in real time—an essential component of the fellowship. The meeting also included dedicated time for each fellow and organization to begin planning next steps for their individual projects.

Between August 2024 and July 2025, fellows worked at the selected arts organizations to collect stories and digitize records documenting their institutional histories. During the year, the fellows worked 8 to 10 hours a week with their partner organi-

zation to conduct oral history interviews with 10 individuals, such as organizational leaders, members, and constituents, and to digitize approximately 50 items that reflect critical moments of the organization. The participating arts organizations' liaisons worked closely with their fellows to identify key individuals to interview and materials to digitize.

During the year, fellows met as a group monthly with SAADA staff. In addition, SAADA staff met monthly with each fellow and their partnered organization together. Beyond these scheduled meetings, SAADA staff also held a number of individual meetings with fellows as needed, particularly to provide support, guidance, or troubleshooting as they navigated relationships with partner organizations and conducted oral history work. SAADA staff also conducted additional one-on-one check-ins with organizational liaisons as needed to follow up on progress, clarify expectations, and address any questions or challenges.

Fellows were paid a stipend of \$10,000, as well as an additional \$1,000 each in travel and equipment costs.

Research Questions

As the Archiving the Arts Fellowship program is the first of its kind, the program raises some key research questions about its impact and surfaces some areas for potential improvement if replicated in the future.

In evaluating the Archiving the Arts Fellowship, we ask the following research questions:

- **Was the fellowship effective in enabling documentation of South Asian American arts organizations? How do we know?**
- **How might SAADA or other community archives adjust this methodology in future documentation efforts, or when used in other types of BIPOC-centered arts organizations?**

These questions supplement the more expansive field-wide questions used in Phases I and II of this research project. By answering these research questions regarding the Archiving the Arts Fellowship specifically, we hope to determine if this type of fellowship addresses the challenges for cultural documentation and preservation of BIPOC arts organizations that were identified in Phases I and II.

Methodology

In August 2025, toward the end of the one-year fellowship period, the second author of this report conducted in-depth semistructured interviews with the three Archiving the Arts fellows and the three organization liaisons. (The interview protocol for fellows can be found in Appendix 3. The interview protocol for organizational liaisons can be found in Appendix 4.) These interviews were conducted via Zoom. With the permission of participants, the sessions were recorded and transcribed. While AI generated the initial interview transcriptions, these were heavily edited for clarity by the second author of this report. The first author of this report then coded the transcripts for recurring themes, as well as points of convergence and divergence between fellows and executive directors.

We provide long block quotes from our interviews as a methodological and ethical choice that enables the voices of our interviewees to shine through. We aim to amplify

the voices of participants, rather than dub over them with our own voices, as recommended by the 2021 findings of the Reciprocity in Researching Records Collective.¹ This study was approved as exempt from full review by UCLA’s Institutional Review Board. All participants gave written consent to be cited by name with permission.

This research fits squarely within an interpretivist research paradigm that presupposes reality to be socially constructed. In an interpretivist research paradigm, it is critical for researchers to acknowledge their positionality, as positionality influences what research questions can be asked, what data is collected, and how that data is interpreted. The first author of this report is a white woman who co-founded SAADA and has been actively engaged in research about SAADA and other community archives sites for the past 15 years. The second author of this report is a white woman who has worked as an archivist, oral historian, and community organizer. We are both outsiders to the communities we studied in this project; we acknowledge that our positionalities impacted the data we collected and our interpretation of that data.

Key Findings

We organize the findings here under two main headings: “Fellows’ Perspectives” and “Organizational Liaisons’ Perspectives.” While there is significant overlap between the reflections of these two groups, we have disambiguated them so that we may understand their distinct perspectives with the aim of evaluating the project and making programmatic recommendations moving forward.

Fellows’ Perspectives

Six key themes emerged from the interviews with the three fellows:

1. Importance of documenting organizational histories
2. Current conditions of preexisting materials
3. Importance of using oral histories to fill in the gaps
4. Challenges of the fellowship
5. Successes of the fellowship
6. Challenges to continuing this work in the future

We will now discuss each theme in more detail.

Fellows’ Theme 1.

Importance of documenting organizational histories

All three fellows discussed the historical importance of preexisting materials at their host organizations. Fellows articulated how their host organizations created and shepherded invaluable records that document crucial areas of South Asian American history and culture. For example, fellow Avehi Menon described materials from The Music Circle, which is the oldest of the three participating organizations:

They have an immense archive. It’s really a treasure, because they have flyers from 1973 in this beautiful visual material archive as well as videos and audio

¹ Michelle Caswell et al., “‘Come Correct or Don’t Come at All’: Building More Equitable Relationships Between Archival Studies Scholars and Community Archives,” UCLA, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7v00k2qz>.

recordings, including of Ravi Shankar playing the sitar.

Menon further detailed the historical importance of these materials and outlined who might use them once they are accessible through SAADA:

The Music Circle has such an important legacy. Apart from the fact that it has all of these [recordings] of some of India's best musicians who came and played here. . . it's also the telling of how these things came to be, about building a South Asian arts organization, about what building an arts organization does in terms of building community, what it does to a generation of South Asians who feel a connection, or who want to introduce their children to Indian classical music. [The materials also reveal] how to open up Indian music to people who are not South Asian. . . . It's an important historical organization to the city and to India, because of the space that it creates for who comes to perform. And it's an important story to tell. For SAADA, it adds to the already important work that they're doing, which is trying to make South Asian voices visible and mainstream, and to be part of the mainstream narrative—as SAADA says, to say that South Asians have been here, and they've been doing all kinds of work, they've been building community, and they've been adding to community. I think it's an important story to be heard and to be told.

Menon is herself a recent immigrant from India. Working with the historical materials at The Music Circle helped her bridge the gap between South Asian and South Asian American cultures and histories, allowing her to see herself as part of both communities.

Similarly, Shravya Kag, who was the fellow placed at SAWCC, addressed the importance of SAWCC's materials to larger historical narratives about South Asian Americans, as well as her own personal sense of belonging in the U.S. Kag said:

I think one of the biggest things for me is that I moved from South India 10 years ago. I'm queer, I'm brown, I'm an artist, I'm in New York City, so it's very easy for me to think. . . there are not a lot of people around me like that. And then I started this fellowship, and then I realized [through working with] SAWCC, Oh, there have always been people like me around.

Like Menon, Kag also emphasized the importance of documenting not just the arts content of the host organization, but the processes by which the host organization was formed and sustained. Kag said:

I think that was one of the most illuminating things for me in this experience and realizing the importance of having this archive, was to hear what the creative scene in the '90s in New York was like, and how people really came together for progressive causes and set up a collective and really, really worked hard at it, to sustain its mission, to sustain its causes, while also lifting everyone within their community. The raw record of what that looked like helped inform my own community-based art practice.

Fellows gave careful thought to who might use the materials they were digitizing, naming students, artists, staff, and volunteers at the organizations, and the broader South Asian American communities. Menon said future users could include “someone like me, someone who is South Asian, who moved here and is trying to figure out whether this is home. And it offers something, it offers a connection.”

Sarangan, the fellow hosted by Twelve Gates, said that the digitized collections would offer inflection points for an internal audience of organizational staff and volunteers. She said:

I think it's important for the organizations themselves, having this as

something that they can share with people moving forward. I think it's really important for them, especially as they think through their future in the coming year. . . . A lot of this [project] is about the future of the organization, and I think this has been a good first step to spark some ideas of what they can do next as they continue to think about that future. That came up a lot in my [oral history] interviews, because one of the questions that I often ask people was: What do you think the gallery can do? What can they lean into more as they move into the future? What's something you would like to see? A lot of people said that taking stock of what they've already done is just as important as figuring out what they're going to do next. And one leads to the other. I think having this archive is a really big step. It's important for them to see how much they've already done and how big of an impact that's had on so many people.

Even though the fellows had been placed at their organizations for just one year, they are all invested in the future of the organizations and noted the ways that their archival work can help community members envision and enact future programs at the organizations. In this way, fellows saw their work preserving organizational history as integral to organizational sustainability.

Fellows' Theme 2.

Current conditions of preexisting materials

All three fellows remarked on the good physical conditions of the preexisting materials at the start of the fellowship. By and large, fellows thought the organizations did a great job of organizing and preserving both analog and digital materials. Unlike other arts organizations that participated in the surveys, interviews, and focus groups reported in Part One and Part Two of this research project, the three selected organizations had dedicated physical and digital space to storing materials and had an organizational system for keeping track of them. These preservation strategies enabled the fellows to focus on digitization rather than basic preservation. For example, Kag commented on the documents she found at SAWCC's offices:

The physical materials were essentially stored by SAWCC in kind of like archival boxes. . . essentially boxes with multiple folders within, so like one box is organizational documents, another box is press releases, another box is exhibition catalogs, etc. Anjali [the organizational liaison] did the heavy lifting of going through the boxes and choosing what to scan. We did one session together where we went through boxes together to pick out items that pique my interest, and items that she thinks are interesting, and then she did the rest of the work to pick the other items she might find interesting. . .

While two of the three organizations rent office space where materials were stored, one organization, The Music Circle, stored materials in the house of a board member. Menon explained:

With the visual material, they were in great condition. Paula had done a fabulous job of cataloging the material and also preserving it. She had all these folders with sleeves, and all of the material was individually placed in these folders, and [she] had marked each folder by year. It was very well cataloged. The photographs were also in excellent condition. I was really amazed with how well it's been kept. . .

In these interviews, it is apparent that the organizations' prior preservation and organization of materials was a precursor for success with this fellowship, particularly because SAADA, as a postcustodial archive, accessions digital surrogates of materials rather than the materials themselves. If records were not well organized or preserved, fellows would have had additional layers of work before being able to digitize materi-

als for inclusion in SAADA's archive. Thus, the current state of materials is an important factor in selecting organizations for participation and in predicting the scope of fellows' work.

Fellows Theme 3.

Importance of using oral histories to fill in the gaps

Although all three fellows discussed the significance of preexisting documentation at their host organizations, they all also emphasized the importance of adding oral histories to the archive. These oral histories offered informal reflections on the processes of community building, added a diversity of perspectives not found in preexisting documentation, and enabled more personal narratives to shine through.

Kag explained,

[SAWCC] is an organization that has 30 years of history. There are a lot of different viewpoints. Oral histories ensured that all these different viewpoints are also interviewed and archived.

Oral histories complement the preexisting materials and enable a fuller story to be told.

All three fellows described conducting the oral histories as a fulfilling experience. Menon, whose fellowship was at The Music Circle, reflected on her own experiences with the oral history component of the project:

It was amazing. Personally, I haven't done oral history interviews for some time because I was working in the museum space. For me, it was just so fulfilling to get back into the process of doing oral history interviews. I love the process of interviewing someone. I love even more the process of coming back and listening to the interview and piecing together how people remember things. It was great. It was a really fulfilling process.

When asked if she thought the oral histories documented a different aspect of organizational history, she responded:

I've always thought oral histories bring in a personal perspective that you wouldn't have gotten if you just did a book on the history of the organization. But more importantly, it is about how people make meaning—how they make meaning of their own lives, of their association with this organization, and what, in some sense, binds people together that's very unspoken. For an organization like this, I think it's really so interesting, it's such an unspoken coming together of people to volunteer because they're passionate about music. And whether they were South Asian or not, music is what brings them together and sustains this legacy. Oral histories give you so much insight into culture, in setups that are voluntary, where people are there because of a certain passion for it, that are structured very differently [than organizations with paid staff]. I think oral histories provide really a great insight into legacy, into culture, into what brings people together.

Sarangan agreed that oral histories were an essential component of this project:

In the instance of Twelve Gates, I think the oral histories are the key part of this archive and, for me, the most rich and important parts of learning about the organization. I think in the oral histories, you get perspective and really personal information and knowledge that you would not be able to get from [other] materials. Each of the people that I interviewed have very close relationships with [the co-founders], but also just with the organization itself, and many of them with SAADA, also with SAWCC, which was another partner organization

[on this project], and with each other, and have incredible knowledge about South Asian art and the South Asian art community that I don't think you can find elsewhere. For me, even just the oral histories alone would make for a very impactful archive. Yes, [the oral histories are] really, really important knowledge and information.

As these quotes confirm, fellows characterized oral history as a personally rewarding and historically critical aspect of this project.

Fellows' Theme 4. Challenges of the fellowship

Fellows also addressed some of the challenges of the yearlong fellowship. These include difficulty in accessing materials, reliance on volunteers who run the organization, navigating relationships while working on a short-term basis, inaccessibility of materials in storage, obtaining copyright clearance, and organizations' expectations of the narrative. At one organization, the original liaison for the fellowship stepped down, leading to continuity and communication issues that required persistence to overcome. Selection of oral history narrators raised some interpersonal and political issues regarding who was authorized to speak about which topics. Some fellows also described a lack of experience conducting oral histories and felt challenged learning as part of this project. Menon described how many of these challenges relate to each other:

I think when you enter any organization as an archivist, and especially an archivist that's not full-time and not hired by the organization... you have to navigate the relationships and underlying stories. For me, working on the archive meant finding the answers to questions such as "Can I use this?" and "Do we have [copyright] permission?"... The other challenge was some of the materials were at a private residence, so one had to respect that and work accordingly.

For Menon, these challenges were exacerbated by the January 2025 Eaton Fire, because The Music Circle's records were stored in a home near the evacuation zone, which was temporarily made inaccessible.

Some fellows also noted a tension in reconciling how organizational leaders wanted their organizations to be represented and how organizations were actually represented in materials and oral histories. It could be challenging for fellows to create space for multiple and sometimes conflicting narratives about organizational history to coexist in the collection. One fellow noted how one organizational liaison selected oral history narrators who would "say good things, to represent the organization in a particular way," while the fellow felt "it's okay if the organization is seen in the various shades in which people experienced it."

She followed up that she understands this impulse to control what materials get included, because the organizational liaison "is the one fundraising and running [the organization], and wanted to present it in a particular light."

It could also be challenging to find the place of specific details within a larger organizational narrative. For example, Kag noted:

I think one of the biggest challenges, really, was understanding that there were a lot of... expectations... to preserve the history in a certain way, or who can illustrate what narrative... or who can talk about the importance of this one very particular, specific thing. I think the challenges I've faced, and I've also noticed that the organization was facing, was to figure out how to preserve [the history] in a very specific way, and I think we got lost sometimes in the

specifics of it.

Despite these challenges, the fellows felt that it was important to the success of the project that they were externally funded fellows working for SAADA, rather than as employees of the organizations. This distance allowed them to see a broader perspective of organizational history.

Fellows' Theme 5. Successes of the fellowship

Despite these significant challenges, all three fellows reported that the fellowship was personally meaningfully and professionally rewarding. All three characterized the experience as an unqualified success. Training and support from SAADA and relationship building with organizational liaisons were significant factors leading to this success.

Fellows named the support of SAADA staff as a crucial element of the fellowship. They noted how SAADA staff supported them at every step in the project, providing structured check-ins, training sessions, and encouragement when needed. The fellows also appreciated the time to gather in-person with other fellows and organizational liaisons at the start of the fellowship and noted the comradery that developed between them. When asked to describe her overall experience as a fellow, Menon said:

I'm extremely satisfied. I think communicating and working with SAADA was amazing. They navigated the entire project really well, the way they spaced out our meetings with them, had regular communication with the fellows and the arts organization. . . . The opportunity to do this work has been invaluable, because it's a fascinating archive. The oral histories I did were really, really fulfilling; I love doing oral histories. And SAADA has been really great at making it also about the process rather than just about the deliverables, which I think is really important. I don't know any other fellowship like it.

Kag, the fellow at SAWCC, also noted that the SAADA staff embodied an ethics of care in this project. Kag said,

I'm very satisfied and grateful for SAADA's unwavering support throughout the process. [SAADA staff] are hype people. They really hype us up for the fellowship. Anywhere where I didn't know what I was doing, I turned to them. It was a very informative and inspiring experience for me.

Sarangan, the fellow from Twelve Gates, echoed this sentiment:

I feel very grateful that I had such an incredible experience with every single person involved in this fellowship, with the entire SAADA team—they're incredible—of course, with Aisha and Atif [co-founders of Twelve Gates], with the other fellows, with every person I interviewed. I feel incredibly lucky and grateful and happy with the way all of it went.

Sarangan also noted that at first, she felt nervous conducting oral histories, because she had never done them before. However, training and encouragement from the SAADA staff led to an "amazing experience." She added that while the fellowship ended, the relationships forged through the fellowship will continue:

The biggest thing that I am taking away from this fellowship is my relationships with these people, with Aisha, with SAADA, and with the people that I interviewed. I was really blown away by the community of people behind Twelve Gates. From the start, Aisha was super generous about introducing me to people, not just the people that I was interviewing, but other artists

or curators who I might connect with. . . I had really great relationships as a part of this fellowship that I want to continue professionally and personally. Working with Aisha was incredible. . . I think everybody who I've spoken to has shared with me how they feel about Aisha and how she brings people together, and I also experienced that. I feel like we will continue to work together in some capacity for a very long time, which is really nice. And same with all the folks at SAADA. I want to be involved in the future as much as possible.

Interestingly, despite the importance of these relationships, Sarangan attributes the success of the fellowship in part to her original status as an outsider to the organization. She said,

I also think it helps to have someone coming in from a different perspective, and who isn't entrenched in the institution or the organization and can kind of see the bigger picture as an outsider, as a researcher, I think is a helpful thing to have.

Entering the fellowship with “just the right amount of distance” to the organization seemed another important factor in creating a successful experience.

Fellows' Theme 6. Challenges to continuing this work in the future

While the fellowship was an unqualified success from the fellows' perspectives, they noted some important challenges for the organizations in terms of keeping up with archiving work after the fellowship. Capacity and continuity emerged as major challenges. Sarangan, for example, stressed the challenges of organizational capacity:

Especially now, small arts organizations are pushed to their limit in so many ways. How to really make this a priority? How to do this when you're already overworked and focused on a lot of different things? Having this type of opportunity continue, a fellowship, where somebody else is able to come in and do [archival work] is one tool to do that.

Menon identified ongoing challenges related to the storage of materials as a threat to the continuity of archival work at The Music Circle:

I think there will have to be decisions made about whether [the materials] remain at a private residence. The long-term question would be how is the material going to be managed and, therefore, where does it get stored? Right now, they're selecting the videos to be digitized; it's a long process and an expensive affair. . . Other decisions include what can be made accessible, and is there someone who can dedicate time to the task of keeping track of the archive? . . . That's a dilemma and challenge with all organizations, arts organizations or otherwise, right? Who keeps the records? Who retains the memory? Who does it get passed on to?

The capacity of organizations to continue this archival work after the fellowship was of primary concern to all three fellows in evaluating the success of this project. This remains a key question in considering the capacity of a fellowship program like this one to address barriers to preserving the history of BIPOC arts organizations.

Organizational Liaisons' Perspectives

We turn now to the findings from our interviews with the arts organizations' liaisons. The liaisons reflect a range of sometimes-overlapping positions within each organization: co-founder, executive director, board member. The following themes emerged in

these interviews:

1. The importance of documenting organizational histories
2. Archiving as a strategy for organizational continuity
3. Current conditions of preexisting materials
4. Success of the project
5. Challenges to continuing this work in the future

Many of these themes overlap with the themes surfaced by the interviews with the fellows.

Organizations' Theme 1.

The importance of documenting organizational histories

All three liaisons articulated the significance of preserving the history of their organizations to internal and external audiences. The ability to tell the story of one's organization autonomously emerged as a source of individual and community empowerment. For example, Aisha Khan, co-founder of Twelve Gates, said, "I truly believe that until we tell our own story, until we preserve our own stories, this whole world is going to stay messed up."

In this way, preserving the history of a single South Asian American arts organization becomes a strategy to tackle the larger issues of South Asian American representations in the past and creating a more just future. For Anjali Goyal, a SAWCC board member, increasing the representation of South Asian Americans in historical narratives was also a major reason why she wanted SAWCC to participate in this project:

There aren't a lot of stories about the South Asian American experience. That's why I really admire the work that SAADA does, that they've been doing for years. I've always wanted to do more to preserve SAWCC's archives and history, but we didn't have the resources. When I saw the opportunity to participate in this project, I was like, Oh, this is perfect, this is exactly what we've been waiting to do, otherwise these stories don't get told. A lot of my work in the arts has also been in Asian American spaces more broadly, so I think that documenting the South Asian piece of this wider Asian American experience is also important, because historically, so much focus has been on the East Asian American experience.

For V.R. Venkataraman of The Music Circle, the preservation and accessibility of organizational history is a way to preserve a performance-based art form for which there is no other documentation. Explaining the history of his organization, he said:

When Indian music in its truest form migrated to the West, there was one man that ended up being the godfather of Indian music, and that is the legendary Ravi Shankar. The Music Circle was called the Ravi Shankar Music Circle, because he was the mastermind in starting that organization back in 1972 with George Harrison. And then his student, Harihar Rao, took it over, and from Harihar Rao, it got passed on to me. . . . Music of that nature, performed by the greatest of our times—the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar Khan, Zakir Hussain—these are all musicians who played in our kitchens, our living rooms, and we would have impromptu get-togethers with 15, 20 people from the neighborhood. And we have all of this footage. . . . There are people who need to listen to what music was in that era. There are days I remember when 40, 50 years ago, when I was in my early 20s, there are times when the

concert would begin at 8:00 pm and would get over at 2:30 in the morning, and not one audience member would leave the hall. They would be glued to their seat, and we as musicians would perform for 5, 6, 7 hours straight. It is unheard of today. . . . This music, in its truest form, is a dying art form, because this has been music that has been passed on from teacher to student in a very traditional style called gurukul. "Guru," as in teacher, "kul," as in the home—home of the teacher. That is how this music was learned. There is no written notation, absolutely none whatsoever in writing.

For Venkataraman, preserving the history of The Music Circle is not just preserving organizational history; it is preserving the history of an entire art form. In his opinion, archival work guarantees continuity, not just of The Music Circle, but of classical South Asian music writ large. He explains that preserving organizational history is important for future generations:

ATMA Ensemble is a musical outreach program of The Music Circle. I am archiving every detail of the ensemble, because, who knows, 50 years from now, if this ensemble really takes off and I'm no longer here, somebody will have the data to show how the ensemble started. Photographs and digital media and sound bites and everything, I am capturing and setting aside in an archival manner. So, that's why archiving the music that we have is important for future generations.

Aisha Khan from Twelve Gates has also thought of who might use their archival collection and how:

I'm going to share [the materials] with everyone and anyone. I want people to see. I want people to listen to those [gallery] talks. I want people to see the blunders we made in those talks. And I want people to see how Twelve Gates' first invitation looked. I want people to hear me, to hear Atif, to meet all my oral history [narrators]. And I want people to understand and think these are real people. I want people to understand how much work goes into running the gallery. From SAADA's point of view, I want people, South Asian diaspora and non-diaspora people, to understand someone cared. Someone cared this much that they formed a whole program, and they said, Okay, we need to build a gallery.

Khan continued that it is for younger generations that she wants the gallery's history to be made accessible:

I'm preserving this for them. They will appreciate it, because when they're exhausted, they're tired of scrolling, they're tired of this instant pleasure, instant gratitude, when they're done, when they're sick of that screen, they'll want to go to these places and find out our history. Many young professionals have walked in and said that "If growing up, we had Twelve Gates in our life, we would have chosen a different major." It happens so many times; people just walk in and they're like, we had no idea our culture is this cool. . . . When I think about preserving the history of Twelve Gates, I think I'm also preserving the history of people of my age as well.

It is clear from these interviews that organizational liaisons understand the significance of their work and have sophisticated conceptions of future users for their collections, especially younger generations of South Asian American community members.

Organizations' Theme 2.

Archiving as a strategy for organizational continuity

Organizational liaisons also expressed how archiving organizational materials was internally useful, giving them the opportunity to reflect on the history of their organizations and plan for continuity of leadership after their involvement ends. As Khan explained:

This is a very pivotal point for me as a human being. I might be retiring in the next 5 to 10 years. I might be leaving Twelve Gates. Who is the person who's going to run it? If you do this kind of archiving work at other organizations, you see, when the founder leaves, what happens? Either you thrive, or you die. So as a founder, where do I want to leave the organization? What do I want to do for the next person? How do I want to pave the way?

Reflecting on the future, Khan continued:

I don't know if we will survive. I'm not saying it in a morbid way. I'm not saying it in a sad way. I'm saying it in a way to [acknowledge] things are changing People who used to support Twelve Gates 15 years ago, they're retiring; some of them are not even around. When they started supporting Twelve Gates, they were in their 70s. Some have moved to senior homes; some of their kids I met as toddlers, and now they are young adults. . . . So, when it comes to archiving the organization, if we don't archive, if we don't talk about what happened in the last 15 years, it doesn't matter anymore if Twelve Gates survives or not, because then anyone can come and write a history as they want to.

Khan also expressed hope that younger South Asian Americans who want to start their own arts organizations will use the Twelve Gates materials in SAADA. She said,

If someone who is 25 or 26 wants to start something, they can [come to SAADA], hear those stories, and they can say, Okay, let's start. We don't have to be super ready to do anything. For me, preserving the history in that sense is also preserving the experiences as well.

In these interviews, there was deep reflection about the progress of each organization; the work that founders, board members, and staff have contributed; and the organizations' sustainability beyond current leadership. In this sense, the process of selecting 50 items to digitize and 10 people to interview sparked larger conversations about capacity, longevity, and sustainability.

Organizations' Theme 3. Current conditions of preexisting materials

Just as the fellows noted, the organizational liaisons said that materials had been well preserved and organized by their predecessors, by their collaborators, or by themselves. For example, Goyal noted how SAWCC's beginnings coincided with the widespread use of email, and yet former SAWCC board members had their own strategies for preserving born-digital records. Goyal explained:

In the '90s, people were using email and the internet, but there wasn't a lot of space online to store things. If you wanted to keep something, you had to print it out. And I noticed that they printed out everything. There are these printouts of email exchanges between the board members. So now we have access to those early conversations that would have been lost otherwise.

Goyal further noted that as digital technologies advanced, storage strategies changed, becoming more decentralized and perhaps less reliable for long-term preservation.

While I was going through files for the SAADA project, I noticed that there really aren't any print materials after 2017, because we just stopped making

print materials after that. The internet had reached a point where we didn't really need to do that anymore. I kind of wonder what's going to happen to all those digital materials in the future. . . . SAWCC's digital files are now mostly in Dropbox, Google Drive, the website, social media. . . . There were these more institutionalized spaces where materials could be stored and saved, even if it was just a filing cabinet in an office. And over time, those spaces have moved online and become more ephemeral. I don't know what happens as we continue moving on into these digital spaces—it's harder to keep track of where stuff is and how to maintain it, [and] easier to let stuff disappear.

Goyal noted how SAADA had previously helped SAWCC preserve a Yahoo Group forum before Yahoo shut down the platform and stressed the importance of preserving digital materials in online spaces.

Organizations' Theme 4. Success of the project

All three participating organizations considered the project to be an unqualified success. The liaisons described productive relationships with both fellows and SAADA staff. Liaisons noted the importance of the match between organization and fellow. Khan from Twelve Gates said,

It was the right match. Sibia is amazing. It's just like we're at the same wavelength. Like, I tell Sibia, "Sibia, I want to do this, but I don't know how to do this." She's like, "I got it."

In other words, the relationship was symbiotic.

Similarly, Goyal from SAWCC described their fellow, Kag:

She's been great. I loved working with her. I feel like we picked the perfect person. She's done oral histories before. She's a photographer and an artist. I knew that with digitizing the materials, we could trust her to do a really great job. She just had the technical skills and experience. But also, it turned out that she had been lurking in the community for a long time, but was too shy to come forward or participate in anything, so it was really nice to be able to bring her in when she'd been lurking for so long.

Goyal further reflected on the success of the project:

I'm so grateful for this fellowship, because we would have never collected these oral histories without a fellow. We would have never digitized these materials without her being able to do it. And part of that is because she was also paid to be a fellow. For an organization of SAWCC's size, we don't get funding for these types of projects.

Khan from Twelve Gates also reflected on the success of the project,

Before SAADA, I only thought [about preserving materials], but I needed this push, I needed someone to guide me. Because we're a small organization, so for us, collaborations are everything. For me, this is a collaboration which came, like, perfect timing. It was literally godsent.

When asked if anything could be improved about the project, Khan responded,

This was godsent, and it was needed, and the way it is evolving and kind of concluding, it's—I just don't want to jinx it—it's just perfect.

Goyal for her part had only one minor suggestion moving forward. She said,

One thing that I wish we had—I know the fellows got to meet with each other on a pretty regular basis—I wish that they had done the same for the orgs. It would have been nice to hear about their processes and challenges, and I just would have liked having that point of connection with other South Asian arts organizations.

All three organizational liaisons also described how SAADA facilitated the fellowship with care and professionalism. Khan said:

I actually truly respect SAADA and I respect Samip a lot. We're good peers, of course; we both run organizations in Philadelphia. I actually respect the work they do, and I respect the way they do it. And then meeting [SAADA staff], meeting the whole cohort, and how generously and how gracefully they brought this together, and how seamlessly this process has been, it's been amazing. . . . They took care of everything.

Similarly, Goyal commented about working with SAADA staff:

They've been amazing. I loved everything about the way that they structured this project. The monthly calls were so helpful. At one point, I was being really hard on myself about being able to meet the deliverables for this project while working a separate full-time job and volunteering my time to SAWCC, and they gave me this whole talk about not being too hard on myself. They've been really kind and accommodating of the limitations that I have on my capacity in that sense. . . . I loved the convening that they did at the beginning of this project. We had this weekend where everybody just got to nerd out about archives and South Asian community and the arts. I don't normally have peers to talk about this stuff with at that level and will probably never get to be in a room like that again. That was fun too.

When asked what made the structure of the fellowship successful, Goyal said:

I think funding and infrastructure is such a huge part of it. Having a fellow who I knew was getting paid, wanting to be accountable to them, having structure around the deliverables, and the monthly meetings to keep us on track were really important. All of those structured things matter, especially for a very small, volunteer-run organization like SAWCC that otherwise isn't going to get this type of project done or prioritize this type of project. That was really important.

Venkataraman described SAADA as “very well organized,” adding, “From an organizational standpoint, I don't think anything would improve.”

Upon further reflection, he said:

Was it worthwhile? Absolutely. I think a lot of questions got answered, a lot of critical analysis was done about the arts organization. A lot of artists participated, which was wonderful, and it also kind of tied in well with the archival project that we are currently doing, aside from SAADA.

It is clear that organizational liaisons appreciated the careful planning, support, and enthusiasm of SAADA staff.

Organizations' Theme 5. Challenges to continuing this work in the future

Despite the success of the fellowship program, organizational liaisons identified some challenges to continuing archival work after the fellowship period. The time, labor,

and expertise it takes to do such work were identified as barriers moving forward, especially for volunteer-run organizations. Liaisons noted that they did not expect unpaid undergraduate interns to be able to continue this work without significant supervision and training.

Venkataraman noted that archival work placed a significant burden on him as a board member, even with volunteers doing much of the labor:

Being a nonprofit, being a volunteer-driven organization, it kind of became a full-time job when we got into the archival project. We have our 40-hour day job, and then we are coming home, and we have 40 hours of this volunteer work that you're doing. And I am probably doing more than 40, because nothing can be archived without me signing off on it, because I'm the only knowledgeable musician in my board.

Additionally, for The Music Circle, copyright clearance has become a major barrier to making recorded performances available online. As Venkataraman explained,

What we did not anticipate [when we made recordings] was the legality of digital media that is now in place. Back then, no signatures were taken from any of the musicians, nothing. And so, we are not in a position to commercialize [the recordings] in any manner, and we don't plan to, but at least we are in a position to archive it and make it available for students who want to study it. . . .

Regardless of these barriers, the liaisons noted that they were grateful to have this opportunity to take a snapshot of their organization's history up to now and are committed to incorporating some archival practices as capacity allows moving forward.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we return to our initial research questions:

- Was the fellowship effective in enabling documentation of South Asian American arts organizations? How do we know?
- How might SAADA or other community archives adjust this methodology in future documentation efforts, or when used in other types of BIPOC-centered arts organizations?

Based on our six interviews, we can easily determine that SAADA's Archiving the Arts Fellowship program was an unmitigated success from the perspectives of both the fellows and the organizational liaisons. Not only did the fellowship allow for the digitization of 150 preexisting records across the organizations, but it also catalyzed the creation and acquisition of 30 new oral histories, providing key perspectives not found in other records. It empowered community organizations to represent themselves, to tell their own stories for themselves and for future generations. And it provided an opportunity for arts organization leaders to take stock of how far their organizations have come and to think critically and imaginatively about where they might be headed. Most importantly, it strengthened relationships—between SAADA, the fellows, and the organizations; between the organizations and their communities; and between the fellows themselves.

At the heart of this success are SAADA's archival care practices. SAADA staff infused relationship building into every stage of this project, from matching fellows to sites and training them on digitization and oral history methodology to building a cohort of fellows to share experiences. While the art forms and organizations documented in

this project are specific to the South Asian American community, the success of this project suggests the potential to replicate this fellowship more broadly between other BIPOC-centered community archives and arts organizations. As our interview data showed, uplifting culturally specific archival care, emphasizing process over product, and paying fellows for archival labor all help create the conditions whereby a more robust, diverse, and representative historic record is possible.

Recommendations for Arts Organizations

- A well-structured and well-funded archival fellowship program can help jump-start the work of documenting and preserving organizational history.
- Setting clear policies about the scope, goals, and duration of such fellowships from the onset is crucial.
- Participating in structured training sessions and check-ins with fellows and archivists is important for setting clear expectations, communicating goals, and monitoring progress.
- Archival work should be done collaboratively, bringing together stakeholders internally within arts organizations, and externally with archivists and funders.
- Building relationships with archivists is crucial for ensuring archival work is done properly. Archivists can train fellows in key aspects of archival work, such as preservation, digitization, and appraisal. Training in oral history methodology can also be key for capturing a more complete organizational history.
- Archival institutions (be they independent, community-based archives or archives located within university or museum settings) can serve as the ultimate home for the records of arts organizations. Such stewardship depends on ongoing, mutually beneficial relationships built on care, trust, and communication between arts organization staff and archivists.
- The perfect should not be the enemy of the good. Limited-term archival fellowships can provide a great way to get started with the work of preserving organizational history, even if additional archival work remains at the end of the fellowship.

Recommendations for Archives

- BIPOC-centered arts organizations are full of invaluable materials that need archival attention. Archivists working at archives of all kinds (from independent, community-based archives to archives located within university or museum settings) should start to build relationships based on trust, care, and equity with staff at BIPOC-centered arts organizations.
- Limited-term, well-structured, and well-funded archival fellowship programs can provide fruitful avenues to grow those relationships. Archivists can pursue funding opportunities for such programs in collaboration with arts organizations.
- Setting structured training sessions and check-ins with fellows and organizational staff is important for setting clear expectations, communicating goals, and monitoring progress.
- Professionally trained archivists can share their skills with arts organization staff and community members by providing training in preservation, appraisal, digitization, etc.
- Collaborations with BIPOC-centered arts organizations take time to flourish and should be based on mutual benefit, trust, negotiation, and care, rather than

limited-term gain, custodial transfer, and extraction. This may require creative and innovative new modes of archival practice, such as postcustodial models and the active creation of new documentation.

Appendices

Appendix 1: SAADA Archiving the Arts Fellowship Application

Criteria:

- Must live within commuting distance to one of the three participating arts organizations
- U.S.-based individuals with valid work authorization
- No formal archival training required, but applicants needed to demonstrate a strong interest and commitment to community memory and storytelling

Application Questions:

- Which organization are you most interested in working with? Why?
- Do you live within commuting distance to the organization?
- Why would participating in this fellowship be meaningful for you personally? (up to 400 words)
- Have you conducted oral history interviews or archival work previously? If yes, please describe.
- Describe a long-term project you have successfully led, including challenges and outcomes.
- Describe a relationship you had to build and sustain for the project above to be successful.
- How will you balance your professional and personal commitments with this fellowship?
- Do you have any accessibility needs we should address to support your participation?
- Is there anything else that would be helpful for us to know?

Appendix 2: SAADA Archiving the Arts Organizational Application

Criteria:

- Eligible U.S.-based South Asian American arts organizations with 501(c)(3) status (or a fiscal sponsor)
- Must have a governance board and at least 10 years of operational history
- Organizations needed to be currently active

Application Questions:

- What is your organization's mission?
- Provide an overview of your structure (staff, volunteers, board).

- Share artistic endeavors or projects that reflect your commitment to South Asian American communities. (up to 400 words)
- What types of materials reflect your organization's history?
- Has your organization documented its history to date? If yes, how?
- Have you collaborated with external partners (academic institutions, archives, etc.) to document your history? If yes, who and when?
- Are you currently working with external partners? If yes, how would this program differ?
- How do you envision working with an archival fellow to ensure communication, access to key information, and project success? (up to 400 words)
- In what ways would participating in this program impact your organization? (up to 400 words)
- Please provide a letter of commitment from your board.
- Is there anything else that would be helpful for us to know?

Appendix 3: Interview Protocol for SAADA Archiving the Arts Fellows

- Please introduce yourself.
- Do you have any formal training or experience as an archivist, oral historian, or museum curator?
- Can you tell me about your fellowship? At what organization were you placed?
- What were you able to accomplish during your time at the organization?
- What kinds of records were you able to document for the organization and SAADA?
- Did you digitize analog records? If so, what condition were those records in when you found them? What did they document? Before your fellowship, were these records at risk?
- Did you collect any born-digital organizational records? If so, what condition were those records in when you found them? What did they document? Before your fellowship, were these records at risk?
- Did you work with the organization to make decisions about what records to collect? How did you make decisions about what records to collect to best represent your organization? Can you guide us through the process of deciding to include a record?
- Did you conduct any oral histories? If so, with whom? If so, why did you think these oral histories were important to include?
- Why do you think this collection is important for the organization and SAADA? Have you thought about who might use this collection and how?
- What do you think are the organization's biggest archival challenges?
- To what degree do you think your fellowship helped meet or solve those challenges?
- What were the biggest challenges you encountered in doing archival work at the organization?

- What was your relationship like with the organization’s executive director, board, and stakeholders? How did this relationship impact your work?
- Did anything surprise you about this fellowship?
- How satisfied are you overall with your fellowship experience?
- If SAADA were to offer this fellowship again, what should be changed?
- Is there anything we haven’t asked you that you would like to discuss?

Appendix 4: Interview Protocol for SAADA Archiving the Arts Organization Liasons

- Please introduce yourself.
- Can you tell us more about the mission and history of your organization?
- Why do you think your organization’s history is important?
- Before the fellowship, have you thought about preserving your organization’s history? If so, did you take any steps to preserve your organization’s records? If so, what were they? Before the fellowship, have you encountered any challenges or barriers to doing that work?
- Can you tell us about the types of records your organization houses? Do you have physical materials? Do you have digital files?
- Where are the records stored? What history do they document?
- What do you think are the organization’s biggest archival challenges?
- To what degree do you think your fellowship helped meet or solve those challenges?
- Were you interviewed for an oral history? If so, what was that experience like?
- How did you make decisions about what records to include in SAADA’s archive?
- What was your relationship like with the fellow?
- How satisfied are you overall with the experience of hosting a fellow?
- How satisfied are you overall with the experience of working with SAADA?
- Have you thought about who might be interested in using your organization’s materials in SAADA and how they might use them?
- If SAADA were to offer this fellowship again, what should be changed?
- Is there anything we haven’t asked you that you would like to discuss?



Archiving the Arts Guidelines

A note for funders: Our research highlights the structural capacity challenges facing arts organizations for preserving their histories, particularly since archival work is not their core function. We encourage funders to:

- Prioritize and support capacity-building resources rather than only directing funding toward programming.
- Ensure grant proposals include archival expertise, possibly through requiring budgeting for an archivist position, or through partnerships with archivists or archival institutions.
- Support projects that emphasize long-term preservation and responsible stewardship.
- Ensure proposals for archival projects are evaluated by reviewers with archival expertise.
- Highlight the role of outside consultants/partners who can bring fresh perspectives and help mitigate institutional gaps.

Guidelines for Organizations Interested in Archiving Materials

The recommendations below are intended to assist BIPOC-centered arts organizations in the preservation of your history. When preparing to archive your organization's materials, it is important to set goals and objectives for the long-term work of preserving "institutional memory," but also stay focused on what is achievable in the short term given your organization's resources and capacities.

Scope, Project Goals, and Audience

- What specific aspects of your organization's history will be archived? (E.g., administrative documents, projects, photographs, recordings.) There may be specific challenges for the genre of arts that your organization produces, and it is important to state those issues to potential funders and supporters.
- What are the primary objectives of the archiving effort? (E.g., preservation, accessibility, educational use.)



- Will you create new documentation (such as recording oral histories) or focus on preexisting materials?
- Who will access or benefit from the archived materials? Internal staff, community members, researchers, the public?

Materials, Technical Skills, and Resource Needs

- What types of materials will be preserved? (E.g., physical, digital, audio, video, artifacts.)
- Who will make decisions about what materials to include? On what basis will these decisions be made?
- Are there current archives or resources that this project will expand or complement?
- Who will manage the project? What skills or professionals (archivists, tech specialists) are needed? Can these skills be gained through partnerships with aligned educational institutions, libraries, archives, and other heritage groups?
- What platforms or tools will be used for digital storage, preservation, and access? What are the costs associated?
- Will analog materials be digitized? If so, at what specifications to enable digital preservation?
- How will archival materials be described? Who will be responsible for archival description?
- How much time is needed to complete the proposed work?
- What kind of equipment (e.g., scanners) or materials (e.g., acid-free folders and boxes) will you need for the project?

Long-Term Stewardship, Ethics, and Copyright

- Where will materials be stored? How will long-term preservation and security of materials be maintained?
- Are there copyright, privacy, or ethical issues to address? How will you obtain copyright clearance and consent to make materials public?
- Who will be responsible for overseeing these aspects of care and relationship maintenance over the long term? A succession plan in the organization should include this role.

Recommendations for Grant Applications

As you prepare for grant opportunities to fulfill the goal of preserving your organization's history, you may want to consider the following questions in shaping the narrative. The grant proposal should get funders and other stakeholders invested in the work of preserving the cultural heritage of your community through the records that your organization holds. To do so effectively, you will want to convey not only a commitment to the work, but a knowledge of the particular skills, expertise, and resources required.

- Scope and objectives: What does the project aim to achieve? State the significance of the work of documentation, digitization, preservation, or exhibition of your organization's records and how archiving your history serves your organization's mission.
- What are the benefits to the organization and the community? How will archiving enhance access or research opportunities for the public?
- Describe formats, storage solutions, digital preservation strategies, and access methods to ensure longevity, noting that posting materials on social media is not a preservation plan.
- Include plans to work with archivists, historians, artists, or technical experts who fill in necessary skill sets for the project tasks.
- Budget to adequately compensate staff, interns, and consultants.
- Provide a long-term sustainability plan for maintaining and updating the collections beyond the grant period.
- Incorporate ways for the community or stakeholders to "activate," engage with, or contribute to the archive.
- Outline measures for handling copyright, privacy, and ethical issues.
- Emphasize the importance of the project and its alignment with funder priorities.
- Include samples or descriptions of existing efforts, if available.
- Include a comprehensive timeline, milestones, and budget breakdown.

Resources for Preserving Community History

The list of organizations and their toolkits or published resources are highlighted here to give BIPOC-serving arts organizations a set of useful tools in planning their own archiving projects. Some of these collectives suggest additional readings that help memory keepers deepen their understanding of community archives.

After Violence Project (AVP) Peer-to-Peer Oral History Toolkit provides useful guidelines and recommendations for community groups to start their own oral history projects: <https://vbtoolkit.afterviolenceproject.org/>

Community Archives Collaborative (CAC), in partnership with the University of California, Irvine Libraries' Community-Centered Archives Partnerships (C-CAP) team, created a "Tools for Community Archives—Academic Relationships" toolkit with recommendations and resources, such as studies and reports related to community archiving: <https://communityarchivescollab.org/tools-getting-started/>

Community Archives Toolkit created by the Tacoma Public Library and University of Washington Information School: <https://community-archives.gitbook.io/toolkit>

Dance/USA's Artist's Legacy Toolkit has useful archiving tips and strategies, particularly for performing arts and dance: <https://www.danceusa.org/archiving-preservation-artists-legacy-toolkit>

Faculty Organizing for Community Archives Support (FOCAS), a collective of nine North American Information Schools, created a Resources page that includes publications related to community archives, syllabi, and lessons: <https://archivalfocas.org/resources/>